THE BULFINCH YEARS, 1818–1829

Architects generally found the Capitol an unlucky place to work. Hallet, Hadfield, and Latrobe saw their work hampered by inexperienced and unsympathetic commissioners and quit the Capitol worn out and discouraged. Latrobe alone was able to leave a notable architectural legacy, and even this was appreciated only after his departure. The Capitol seemed more a place to ruin reputations and wreck careers than to build them. Yet the architect who replaced Latrobe, Charles Bulfinch of Boston, was able to break the curse and to prove that it was possible to thrive in the politically charged atmosphere of Washington.

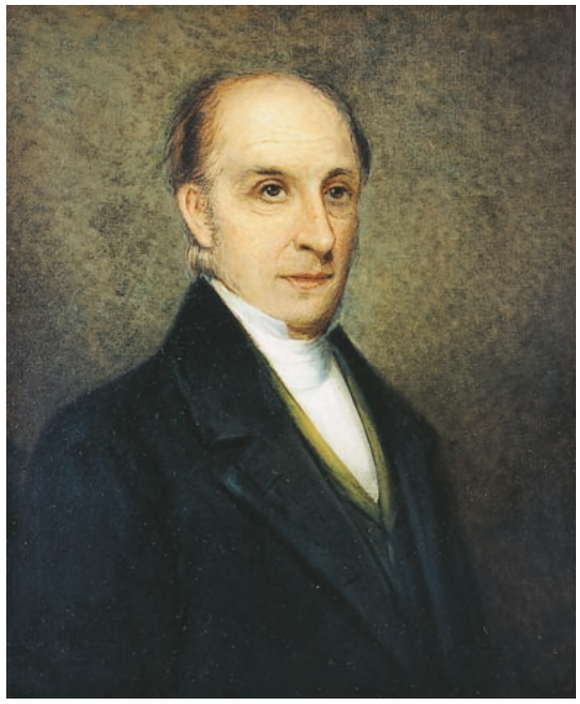
Well before Latrobe resigned in November 1817 it was common knowledge that he could not last long. William Lee, a Massachusetts native living in Washington, wrote Bulfinch on September 17 with news of Latrobe's pending removal. Lee was an auditor in the Treasury Department, a friend of Latrobe, and a confidant of President Monroe. Knowing the situation well, he advised Bulfinch to apply for the position. "I am sorry, for Latrobe, who is an amiable man, possesses genius and has a large family," Lee wrote sympathetically, "but in addition to the President not being satisfied with him there is an unaccountable and I think unjust prejudice against him in the Government, Senate and Congress."[1] Lee went on to say that the climate of Washington was not as bad as most New Englanders thought, and from April to December it was as comfortable as the south of France. Society was "on the best footing" and the opportunities for gaining a national reputation were good. In short, moving to Washington would not be as bad as one might think.

Bulfinch's response was a mixture of deference to Latrobe, intrigue at the prospect of a prestigious commission, and dread of breaking up his household and family ties in Boston. He especially disliked the idea of being party to Latrobe's removal:

> I have always endeavored to avoid unpleasant competition with others, that opposing their interest would excite enmity and ill will. I should much regret to be an instrument of depriving a man of undoubted talents of an employment which places him at the head of his profession and which is necessary to his family's support.[2]

Concern with the disruption of his own family, particularly the education of his younger children,

View of the Capitol (Detail)
by Charles Burton, 1824
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase
Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1942



Portrait of Charles Bulfinch

by George Matthews, 1931
after Alvan Clark, 1842

Descended from a prominent New England family, Bulfinch (1763–1844) was educated at Harvard in mathematics and drawing. His understanding of ancient and modern architecture was gained principally through books and during an extensive European tour mapped out by Thomas Jefferson. In England he admired the work of Robert Adam and William Chambers, whose differing styles of neoclassicism influenced his subsequent work. After his return to Boston, Bulfinch's first major project was the Tontine Crescent, a row of sixteen townhouses that, while beautifully designed, brought financial disaster to the young architect. A more successful project was the elegant Massachusetts Statehouse, which landed him at the top of his field in New England and secured his reputation in the realm of public architecture. Samuel Adams and Paul Revere laid its cornerstone on July 4, 1795.

Bulfinch balanced a career as an architect with public service, holding a number of top posts in Boston's city government. While his finances were slow to recover, his reputation and standing in the community rose steadily. When asked to succeed Latrobe at the Capitol he accepted with reluctance yet grew to like the job as well as the city of Washington. He was justifiably proud of his accomplishments, such as the beautiful room he designed for the Library of Congress, which was unfortunately destroyed in 1851. He completed the building in 1826, finished the landscaping in 1829, and quietly retired to Boston a year later.

was the principal reason Bulfinch winced at the thought of moving to Washington. Yet the chance to complete the nation's Capitol presented a strong inducement. Bulfinch would consider it only if a vacancy occurred for reasons entirely unconnected with himself.

Over the following few weeks Lee kept Bulfinch abreast of developments in Washington. At the beginning of October he wrote that the president returned from New England determined to dismiss Latrobe but was prevented by friends of the architect. Lee thought the situation would not allow both Latrobe and Lane to continue much longer and predicted that the architect would be dismissed because the commissioner had more friends. Again he described the plight of the beleaguered architect with sympathy:

> I do not know how it is, but so it is, Latrobe has many enemies; his great fault is being poor. He is, in my opinion, an amiable, estimable man, full of genius and at the head of his profession. Every carpenter and mason thinks he knows more than Latrobe, and such men have got on so fast last year with the President's house (a mere lathing and plastering job) that they have the audacity to think they ought to have the finishing of the Capitol, a thing they are totally unfit for. That superb pile ought to be finished in a manner to do credit to the country and the age.[3]

Bulfinch's name was mentioned to the president in case Latrobe was forced to leave. Lee urged him to write the president directly but he refused to make a move as long as Latrobe remained in office. Bulfinch thought Latrobe's "talents entitle him to the place, and that he is the most proper person to rebuild what he had once so well effected."[4]

A few days after Latrobe left office, Senator Harrison Gray Otis of Massachusetts went to see Monroe to ask if the architect's office should be filled by "looking to Boston."[5] The reference to Bulfinch was all too obvious and the president replied: "Sir, we are looking to him, but Mr. Latrobe is a great loss, and it will require perhaps two persons to supply his place, and we think also of a Mr. McComb." Monroe asked Otis to provide background information on Bulfinch's character, qualifications, family, and current circumstances. Monroe told the senator that the commissioner of public buildings had been instructed to write Boston with an offer. "I am thus led to suppose," Otis wrote Bulfinch, "that the business may be

considered done." Dropping the idea of hiring two architects, the next day Lane wrote Nehemiah Freeman of Boston, asking him to inform Bulfinch of his appointment as architect of the Capitol. Not wanting the least ambiguity about their relative positions to cause problems in the future, he wished the architect to be reminded that "the appointment is entirely at the disposal of the Commissioner."[6]

Although Bulfinch's appointment was handled through friends, the groundwork had been laid during two visits that brought him face-to-face with President Monroe. The first, his tour of Washington in early January 1817, was followed by the president's trip to New England during the summer of the same year. While Bulfinch was the de facto mayor of Boston as chairman of the board of selectmen, most of his income was made through an architectural practice. After the close of the War of 1812, Massachusetts embarked on a program of public improvements that included construction of two hospitals—one general and one for the insane. Bulfinch was the architect of both. While on a fact-finding tour of medical facilities in New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, Bulfinch made a three-day visit to Washington to see Congress in session at the Brick Capitol. During this sightseeing trip, former Senator James Lloyd of Massachusetts introduced him to President Monroe, who asked the commissioner of public buildings to escort their distinguished guest over the works at the Capitol. Before dashing off to Baltimore, Latrobe met Bulfinch at the Capitol on January 7, 1817, showed him the restoration plans, and took him around. Hoban showed similar courtesies at the President's House. Bulfinch was entertained in Dolley Madison's drawing room two nights in a row, where he found "a great display of beauty and a collection of distinguished persons from all parts of our country."[7] During this short stay he made friends in Washington and, more important, made the personal acquaintances of the president and commissioner, acquaintances that would pay unexpected dividends in the near future. They were obviously impressed by an architect of such high political stature, a calm, deliberate man with polished manners and an impeccable New England pedigree. The contrast with their brilliant but high-strung architect must have been startling. Having enjoyed his visit, Bulfinch parted company never expecting to see them or the Capitol again.[8]

Six months after Bulfinch left Washington, news reached Boston that Monroe planned a visit to the city on his New England tour. A committee was appointed to provide the president with a warm and cordial reception, and, as chairman of the selectmen, Bulfinch was put at its head. They met the president and his party in Providence, Rhode Island, and escorted them to Dedham, Massachusetts, and on to Boston, where they arrived on July 2, 1817. After a brief speech by Senator Otis, a parade marched through the streets of Boston amid the cheers of an enthusiastic crowd of spectators. Monroe on a white charger, Bulfinch and other committee members in open carriages, and military officers and citizens on horseback, they rode two and a half miles accompanied by music from bands positioned along the way. Coming upon a throng of four thousand children holding red and white roses, Monroe stopped a moment to admire the extraordinary sight. The parade ended at the Exchange Coffee House, where Bulfinch welcomed the president in the name of the people of Boston. Monroe made a suitable reply, after which the party adjourned for a dinner attended by former President John Adams, the president of Harvard College, and the lieutenant governor of Massachusetts. Over the next four days, Monroe was escorted around the city; to church services; to Cambridge where he received an honorary degree from Harvard; and to dinners and receptions. Much of his time was spent with Bulfinch, who may have pointed out some of the beautiful buildings he designed that were such conspicuous ornaments of the city. By the time the presidential party departed for Salem, the former seat of Federalist discontent had given Monroe a welcome as warm, friendly, and hospitable as could have been wished. Here began "The Era of Good Feelings," and the president may have asked himself why things at the Capitol could not proceed with similar harmony.

Through his office, education, and family, Bulfinch's place in Boston society was high; his financial situation, however, was meager. Moving to Washington was a venture not to be undertaken lightly, but a steady paycheck was an important consideration. Unlucky ventures in real estate had

cost him dearly. In 1796, bankruptcy took not only all of his property but also that of his wife and parents. Earnings from his architectural practice were erratic, and petty debts landed him in jail for a month in 1811. The prospect of a dependable income was enough to induce him to leave his home, his relatives, and his friends. When he first heard of the Capitol job, it was rumored that the architect's position and the commissioner's job might be blended together with a salary of $4,000 or $5,000 a year. The prospect of earning that much money was perhaps the strongest consideration Bulfinch gave to his removal to Washington. He calculated that $3,500 would support his family in decent comfort and allow for entertainment expenses and hosting friends from Boston.[9] Lee thought that $3,000 would be sufficient to live in the best manner, but when the job was offered the salary was $2,500.[10] But it was still enough to entice Bulfinch to uproot his family and move to Washington.

AT THE OFFICE

On December 22, 1817, Bulfinch presided over his last meeting of the board of selectmen. The following March his service to Boston was acknowledged at the city's annual meeting when the thanks of the town were presented in a resolution. While grateful, Bulfinch privately considered the resolution thanking him for almost nineteen years of public service somewhat stingy, referring to it as "the cheap reward of republics."[11] Leaving his political career behind, Bulfinch departed Boston in the company of his son and reached Washington during the first week of January 1818. They went immediately to the President's House to see Monroe. Father and son were received in a beautifully decorated apartment by the president, who welcomed them to the federal city, promised his support, and encouraged the elder Bulfinch to confer frequently with him on matters relating to the Capitol.[12] Following a courtesy call on Secretary of State John Quincy Adams the next day, Bulfinch went to the Capitol to take possession of his office. There he received his official appointment from the commissioner and was perhaps surprised to find that his salary had started on December 11, 1817.[13] He took possession of the architect's office in the Capitol, a room about 20 feet by 25 feet, that was furnished with tables, desks, drawing paper, and drafting instruments. Bulfinch's office hours were from 10 o'clock in the morning until 3 o'clock in the afternoon.[14]

Led by the head carpenter Peter Lenox, Bulfinch made a minute examination of the two wings, was introduced to the foremen, and visited the sheds, where he found most of the 120 workmen cutting and polishing Potomac marble. He was favorably impressed by Lenox, whom he called "an intelligent, middle-aged man," and was grateful to have him lead the way. "Without such a guide," Bulfinch wrote his wife, "it would be impossible for a stranger to tread the mazes of this labyrinth." He returned to his office to study the drawings left by Latrobe. Some showed the approved design of the wings and some showed the plan for the center building, which was still unsettled. Initially struck by the stunning quality of Latrobe's artistry, Bulfinch soon found fault with some aspects of the designs:

> At first view of these drawings, my courage almost failed me—they are beautifully executed, and the design is in the boldest style—after longer study I feel better satisfied and more confident in meeting public expectations. There are certain faults enough in Latrobe's designs to justify the opposition to him. His style is calculated for display in the greater parts, but I think his staircases in general are crowded, and not easy of access, and the passages intricate and dark. Indeed, the whole interior, except the two great rooms, has a somber appearance.

Bulfinch was critical of the staircases and passageways in the two wings. He also did not care for the spareness of decoration that seemed unnecessarily "somber." Bulfinch's own approach to interior design would be more clear and direct, less complicated than the plan of the wings. Room arrangements would be straightforward and easily understood. Stairs would be easy to find, broad, and gentle. Passages would be straight, wide without being wasteful, and well lighted. And, where appropriate, delicate moldings and carvings would be used as ornamental trim to provide refined elegance. Part of Bulfinch's architectural style had been developed in Boston and part was a reaction to what he disliked about Latrobe's taste. He would not be unduly influenced by his predecessor's work except where there was no other choice

but to carry on with what had been started. There would be plenty of opportunities to make his own mark on the center building, which he began to design soon after arriving in Washington. Naturally, the outside would follow the basic design of the wings, but there was also room for invention, particularly around the porticoes and dome. Everything inside the center building would showcase Bulfinch's taste.

At the beginning of 1818, Congress appropriated $200,000 to continue repair of the public buildings. The Senate requested an up-to-date report on expenditures, an account of the progress made so far, and an estimate of the cost of finishing the wings. Lane reported that $159,655 ("Errors excepted") had been spent to repair the Capitol in 1817 and transmitted a statement from the architect about conditions at the Capitol.[15] Bulfinch acknowledged that the designs of his predecessor would produce splendid public rooms that would "exhibit favorable specimens of correct taste and the progress of the arts in our country." He was preparing several designs for the center building from which the president might choose. As soon as the weather permitted, the principal and back staircases in the north wing would be installed and the roof would be ready for its copper covering. The framing of the roof over the south wing was about two-thirds prepared. Most of the doors and all the window frames and sashes were made, and there was enough glass on hand for glazing. Only three columns and two pilasters for the House chamber were finished, but fifteen columns and two pilasters were in the hands of the cutters and polishers; the rest were at the quarry. Bulfinch estimated that $28,000 was needed to finish the marble work and predicted that all the columns would be completed by August. Other marble work included three styles of mantels: twenty for small committee rooms at eighty dollars each; twenty for larger committee rooms at $100 each; and ten mantels for the principal rooms at $200 each. He estimated that the sixteen pilasters on the upper wall of the Senate chamber would cost a total of $3,200. (These were omitted later.) It was impossible to estimate the cost of the allegorical statuary, but the sculptors' salaries would amount to $8,000 for the year ahead. A total of $177,803 was needed to finish the restoration of the Capitol's two wings.

In the House of Representatives, the Committee on Expenditures on Public Buildings, chaired by Henry St. George Tucker of Virginia, made its own inquiries into the financial state of affairs. It found the probable cost of restoring the Capitol, President's House, and executive offices would be one million dollars—twice the original estimate. It duly noted that the cost of restoration was likely to come very close to the amount originally spent to build these structures. It blamed the exorbitant cost overruns on the changes made to the plans of the Capitol, particularly those made to the north wing.[16] The expense of the marble columns greatly aggravated the situation. Lane wrote Tucker's committee about the columns and the trouble they caused. He described the history of Potomac marble, the original contract with John Hartnet for shafts needed for the House of Representatives, and Hartnet's inability to uphold his part of the bargain. Not wishing to abandon the marble, and not finding anyone else to partner with Hartnet, the president and the commissioner decided to operate the quarry with public funds, hiring a large gang to speed the work along. Temporary huts furnished with bedding and cooking utensils were built for workmen. Clothing for slaves was also provided. These extraordinary expenses accounted for much of the cost overrun, but Lane hoped the expense and headache would be worthwhile. He confessed that the marble had been a source of "perpetual anxiety and vexation."[17]

A few weeks later Lane again wrote Tucker explaining how the works had been affected by increasing labor and material costs. He stated that from February 1, 1815, to January 1, 1818, a total of $324,100 had been spent to restore the north and south wings, which compared favorably with the $788,071 expended to build them initially. He also provided a chart to compare the price of goods and services during different periods.

	1793–1800	1800–1812	1815–1818
Stone cutters' daily wage	$1.25 in winter $1.33 in summer	$1.50 in winter $1.75 in summer	$2.50 in winter $2.75 in summer
Brick layers' daily wage	$1.50 in winter $1.75 in summer	$1.50 in winter $1.75 in summer	$2.00 in winter $2.75 in summer
A laborer's daily wage	75¢	75¢	$1.00
Sandstone per ton	$7–$8	$8–$9	$10–$12
Brick per thousand	$7	$7–$7.50	$9–$9.50

Tucker's committee was satisfied that work was being done as quickly and economically as conditions permitted. Lane assured the committee that the wings would be ready by November 1818. Inadequate funding was the only thing that could disappoint congressional hopes of returning to the Capitol. On the last day of the session, Congress passed a series of appropriations specifically for the Capitol in addition to the $200,000 already given for the public buildings. Eighty thousand dollars was allocated to complete the wings, $30,000 was given to furnish the hall of the House and committee rooms, and $20,000 for furnishing the Senate chamber and committee rooms. It was clear that there would not be enough committee rooms until the center building was completed. The shortage would be particularly annoying to the House of Representatives in the south wing, which had only nine rooms available for committee use. Bulfinch designed a temporary wooden structure a hundred feet long, forty-two feet wide, and ten feet high containing twelve rooms and a passage; he estimated that it would cost $3,634, which Congress readily granted. One hundred thousand dollars was also appropriated to begin the center building.[18] It was the most flush day in the history of the Capitol's accounts in the twenty-five years since the building was begun.

At the beginning of the 1818 building season, labor troubles and construction problems set the works back sufficiently to shatter hopes of seating Congress in the Capitol that fall.[19] First, stone cutters struck for higher wages, bringing their critical work to a standstill for a month. On May 25, 1818, Blagden was instructed to find replacements in Baltimore, but he had to warn the newcomers of possible reprisals from the striking workmen.[20] The menacing behavior of seven or eight discharged stone cutters landed them in jail and a detachment of Marines was deployed to keep fellow masons from attempting a rescue. Tempers cooled and the masons' union was dissolved. Lane did not want to rehire stone cutters who went on strike, but Blagden could not find enough hands in Baltimore to replace them all.[21]

At the end of April 1818 workmen were preparing to build the stone lantern that would crown the roof of the north wing. Unlike its twin on the south wing, which was made of wood, the Senate's lantern was built of stone because it contained flues snaking up from eighteen fireplaces. Latrobe had designed a barrel vault forty feet long and thirty feet wide to carry the lantern, but when work progressed under Bulfinch's supervision the vault did not appear strong enough to support the flues and lantern. When the centering was removed, the curb encircling the opening at the top of the vault twisted out of shape by four inches and collapse appeared imminent.[22] Workmen scattered and would not go near it until it was shored up. With the help of General Swift and Colonel Bomford, Bulfinch devised a way to support the lantern and prop up the vault. Under the aperture a hollow cone was built that was similar to (but much smaller than) the one devised by Sir Christopher Wren to support the cupola at St. Paul's in London. The crown of the cone was fifteen feet in diameter, matching the interior diameter of the lantern. Light and air passed through this opening to the skylight over the Senate lobby and to interior windows in the third-floor corridor and the small staircase sometimes referred to as the "library stair."

While the cone successfully solved a potentially dangerous problem, its construction delayed completion of the roof by four weeks. Bulfinch wrote an account of the problem, which he transmitted to Congress along with his annual report. Soon thereafter Latrobe retaliated with a printed pamphlet entitled *Vindication of His Professional Skill.*[23] Bristling under what he considered harsh censure, Latrobe argued the case of an "Old public Servant." He stated that the arch was not begun until after he resigned, yet he had been so concerned about it that he returned to instruct the masons on how to build it. He blamed George Blagden for spreading unfounded fears about the security of his arches and for working behind the scenes to discredit the vaulting system used in the two wings. Properly built, such an arch would have supported ten times the weight it was expected to carry. He had intended to lay in an iron hoop at the circular opening for strength and to use more iron in the lantern itself. If his intentions had been followed, no problem would have been encountered and his engineering skill would not have been questioned. In the end, Latrobe's pamphlet accomplished nothing and probably struck readers as new evidence of a particularly thin skin.

During this period Lane continued searching for mantels. In 1817 he sent a large order for Italian mantels via an English merchant and learned that 161 cases of chimney pieces had been shipped from Leghorn in the beginning of October. How many mantels were included in the shipment is unclear, but it was not enough. On July 20, 1818, Lane sent a drawing of a mantel to Senator David Daggett of Connecticut, taking advantage of his offer to negotiate with the owners of the Milford verde antique quarry for four green marble mantels needed for the Senate chamber. "I confide to your discretion," wrote the commissioner, "to procure them on the best terms in your power."[24] Ten days later Daggett replied with prices that alarmed Lane. He wanted to oblige the senator's wish to see Connecticut marble in the Capitol, but did not wish to waste the public's money and incur the wrath of "an august body that pays us an annual visit."[25] Speaking as a member of that august body, Daggett replied that he too wished to avoid spending funds foolishly and assured Lane that mantels from New Haven would not cause complaint.[26]

Lane's concern about the mantels for the Senate chamber poses intriguing questions regarding mantels ordered for that room from Traquair's marble yard in Philadelphia before the fire of 1814. Those mantels were designed by Giovanni Andrei, ordered by George Blagden and Thomas Munroe, made, and boxed up but stayed in Philadelphia after news of the invasion was first heard. On April 17, 1817, Traquair wrote the commissioner that these mantels had not been paid for and would remain with him subject to orders from Washington.[27] Five months later, Blagden and Andrei were in Philadelphia and inspected the mantels to determine their value.[28] Lane was anxious for more mantels, especially those with appropriate carvings, and sent for them. Why then did he need four mantels for the Senate chamber the next year? And why were only two of these mantels in the chamber when its restoration was undertaken in the 1970s? The answer may lie in a letter written in 1822 by Lane's successor to William Seaton, one of the editors of the *National Intelligencer.* To help settle Lane's estate, Seaton was asked about the price paid for a chimneypiece sold him by the deceased commissioner. Seaton replied that it was presented to him as a gift.[29] If Lane were, indeed, in the habit of handing out chimneypieces to influential members of the press, it would well explain why multiple sets of mantels were ordered for the Senate chamber.

On June 15, 1818, the last cargo of Potomac marble left the quarry headed for the federal city. Lane's overseer there, Solomon Davis, made preparations to sell the public property on Samuel Clapham's land. Virtually worthless things such as workmen's huts, bedding, blankets, pots, pans, and other utensils, as well as more valuable items like handpicks, hammers, axes, wedges, and derricks had to be sold. Clapham initially did not want compensation for the marble but changed his mind near the close of the project. Lane agreed to pay, and they asked William Stewart and Thomas Towson, quarriers from Baltimore, to join them at the quarry to determine the price. John Hartnet and Solomon Davis were also there to explain how much stone was extracted from the site. Together, the two impartial judges determined that the commissioner should pay Clapham $1,500 and recommended that someone else put a price on the value of firewood and other timber consumed during two years of government occupation.[30]

When Congress returned to Washington in November 1818, the House Committee on Public Buildings inspected the wings to see if everything that could be done to finish them was being done. It reported that more had been accomplished during the previous year than during any other period. The chairman of the committee, Joseph Bellinger of South Carolina, asked the commissioner to explain why they were not ready as promised. Lane forwarded Bulfinch's annual report containing the answers, but prefaced it by saying he too felt disappointed and promised to have everything ready for the next Congress.[31] Perhaps the delay was just as well, Lane wrote, because airing out the interiors for another season would prevent the "green and damp" conditions that otherwise would injure the health of congressmen and senators.

Bulfinch's report gave a succinct account of the troubles preventing completion of the work. More important, it detailed some expenses unforseen in his last funding request and some that would be incurred in finishing the restoration. Two thousand dollars was spent to build the brick cone supporting the lantern over the north wing. New York marble for the Senate chamber would cost $15,000 by the

time the order was filled. Marble fashioned in Philadelphia for the hall of the House would cost an additional $1,300. Iron work and copper from London intended for the roof had been received but the bill had not arrived by the time Bulfinch made out his last funding request. Those materials cost $14,282. And finally, $10,750 would be needed to cover the invoice just received for the marble capitals carved in Italy for the Capitol. In all, Bulfinch asked for $51,332 to cover these expenses.[32]

The reasons for the delay in completing the restoration were fully understood and accepted by the committee, which sympathetically thought the sheer magnitude of the undertaking was a powerful mitigating circumstance. More than once while Latrobe was in office, Congress was informed about delays and cost overruns and usually reacted harshly, often with attacks on the architect. But the reaction to the current situation marked a new and welcome era of tranquility. Without hesitation, the funds Bulfinch requested were appropriated on the last day of the session, as was the custom. In addition, $136,000 more was given for the center building.[33] Since it would no longer be needed, Congress ordered the Brick Capitol returned to its owners.[34]

Even as Lane and Bulfinch apologized for the unfinished state of the Capitol, a few rooms in the north wing were being occupied. On December 3, 1818, Senator Mahlon Dickerson of New Jersey, chairman of the Joint Committee on the Library, authorized Lane to start moving books into the rooms on the third floor, which would house the Library of Congress until the center building was completed. In 1815 cash-strapped Thomas Jefferson sold Congress 6,487 volumes to replace those lost in the fire. His personal library formed the nucleus of the new congressional library, which was first housed in the Brick Capitol. In March 1819 the secretary of the Senate was informed that his room on the second floor (modern day S–233) was ready, signaling the return of Senate officers.

During the 1819 building season all the columns in the House chamber had been set, the entablature completed, and the wooden ceiling finished. Bulfinch asked the Italian artist Pietro Bonnani to develop schemes for painting the ceiling that would imitate a masonry dome with coffers. On April 20, 1819, he informed the commissioner that the sketches were done and a decision was needed. A design derived from the Pantheon in Rome was selected, and Bonnani was put to work transforming the smooth ceiling into what would appear (until it was replaced in 1901) as a coffered dome. While Bonnani worked above, Carlo Franzoni's magnificent clock, the *Car of History*, was placed over the principal entrance at the north end of the chamber. It was carved from one of the scarce blocks of Italian white marble that Latrobe had rescued from Blagden's scheme to slice them into hearths for the President's House. Enrico Causici modeled *Liberty and Eagle* from twenty-five barrels of isinglass plaster bought from a Baltimore merchant.[35] The sculpture was never carved in marble due to the lack of materials. The plaster group was placed high above the Speaker's chair.

In the Senate chamber, circumstances conspired to dilute much of Latrobe's ambitious design. Where the original plan called for a procession of caryatids representing the union of states, the completed room had no allegorical sculpture at all. Plans to cover the room with a brick dome were canceled for reasons of safety, economy, and expediency. A plaster ceiling carried on wooden trusses gave the impression of a masonry dome and was elegantly decorated with plaster ornaments such as stars, arrows, and Grecian honeysuckle. But the overall effect was less than Latrobe had hoped and, indeed, less than what had been seen in the old chamber. After the room was rushed to completion, crimson drapery, mahogany furniture, and brass lighting fixtures did something to restore the overall impression of luxury and taste. While the Senate chamber ranks high among Latrobe's finest interiors, he undoubtedly would have considered it inferior to the room destroyed in 1814.

PLANNING THE CENTER BUILDING

Bulfinch had been on the job less than a week when he was asked by the commissioner to give a plan and estimate for the center building.[36] The time had come to begin the middle section, which had been deferred since Stephen Hallet was dismissed in 1794. A committee of the House of Representatives wished to review a plan and Bulfinch wasted no time in preparing one.

Senate Chamber

Although the chandelier and the canopy date from a later period, this modern view of the Senate chamber shows the room essentially as Bulfinch finished it in 1819. The visitor gallery supported on marble columns is an original feature, while the semi-circular gallery supported on metal columns was added in 1828. (1976 photograph.)

Latrobe's plans remained in the office and would be used as a point of departure. Bulfinch might also have been aware of Hallet's proposals for this part of the Capitol because some of his square courtyard foundations still remained in place. Dr. Thornton's thoughts on the subject were doubtless given when Bulfinch visited him at the Patent Office shortly after arriving in Washington. To his wife Bulfinch described Thornton as "a very singular character," who still complained bitterly about Latrobe.[37]

One consideration governed Bulfinch's thoughts about the center building: he was obliged to provide as many committee rooms as possible. There was talk of doing away with the Capitol's grandest room—the rotunda—in order to gain more space for committees. There were not enough rooms for all the standing, joint, special, and select committees, and there was a growing need for offices as well. Some thought the space taken up by the rotunda was enough to supply all the committee rooms Congress could ever use. They believed that the room could be better devoted to the business of Congress. To some, it was just a wastefully large vestibule. A more modest entry flanked by committee rooms, some legislators thought, would better suit the purpose of the Capitol.

Although its construction had been long delayed, the idea of a central rotunda was one of the few aspects of the original plan to survive from the beginning. In 1793 Thornton proposed placing the equestrian statue of George Washington voted by Congress in the center of the room. (This was

at odds with the L'Enfant plan, which placed it on the Mall.) Soon after Washington's death Thornton suggested building a mausoleum for his remains in the rotunda. He wrote that the monument was intended to be made

> of large blocks of white marble enclosing a Tomb meant for the reception of his Body, with that of his consort. The rocks of marble should be crowned by a cloud & on this cloud the angel of Immortality should be leading Washington by the hand & pointing upward with expanded wings ready to take flight with the enraptured Chief, accompanied by the partner of his life. In the lower region of the rocks there would be subservient figures.[38]

However improbably, Thornton claimed that his design was blessed by the Italian sculptor Giuseppe Ceracchi. In Jefferson's administration, the idea of a hero's mausoleum in the rotunda was scrapped: it was to be the "Hall of the People." Latrobe's revisions to the rotunda's design eliminated the columns and placed large-scale niches between the four doors located at the cardinal points. A later design included twenty-four smaller niches for portrait busts. Perhaps Jefferson wished the rotunda to serve as a "most honourable suite," like the tea room at Monticello where busts of Washington, Franklin, Lafayette, and John Paul Jones were displayed.

In 1817 the first concrete step was taken to define the role of the rotunda aside from being the Capitol's grand vestibule. The government commissioned John Trumbull to paint four scenes from the American Revolution specifically for the room. The artist had already sketched ideas for several scenes and actively sought the federal commission. Among his Revolutionary War scenes, the *Declaration of Independence in Congress, at Independence Hall, Philadelphia, July 4, 1776* was the most popular. Trumbull began sketches for the painting in 1786 while visiting Jefferson in Paris. There the Declaration's author gave him a detailed description of the setting and provided other information to guarantee an authentic depiction of the event. In addition to the *Declaration of Independence,* Congress wanted three more Revolutionary War pictures and appropriated $32,000 on January 27, 1817, to pay for them. A noble series of history paintings mounted in the heart of the Capitol would honor the events surrounding the country's quest for independence and self-determination.

Questions still remained about how large the paintings should be and what events other than the signing of the Declaration should be depicted. The artist met with President Madison to discuss the size and subjects of the paintings, and he recalled the conversation at length in his autobiography:

> The size was first discussed. I proposed that they should be six feet high by nine long, which would give to the figures half the size of life. The president at once overruled me. Consider, sir, said he, the vast size of the apartment in which these works are to be placed—the rotunda, one hundred feet in diameter, and the same in height—paintings of the size you propose, will be lost in such a space; they must be of dimensions to admit the figures to be the size of life.
>
> This was so settled, and when we came to speak of the subjects, the president first mentioned the battle of Bunker's Hill. Observing me to be silent, Mr. Madison asked if I did not approve that. My reply was that if the order had been (as I had hoped) for eight paintings, I should have named that first; but as there were only four commanded, I thought otherwise. It appeared to me, that there were two military subjects paramount to all others. We had, in the course of the Revolution, made prisoners of two entire armies, a circumstance almost without parallel, and of course the surrender of General Burgoyne at Saratoga, and that of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown, seemed to me indispensable. True, replied he, you are right; and what for the civil subjects? The declaration of independence, of course. What you have for the fourth? Sir, I replied, I have thought that one of the highest moral lessons ever given to the world, was that presented by the conduct of the commander-in-chief, in resigning his power and commission as he did, when the army, perhaps, would have been unanimously with him, and few of the people disposed to resist his retaining the power which he had used with such happy success, and such irreproachable moderation. I would recommend, then, the resignation of Washington. After a momentary silent reflection, the president said, I believe you are right; it was a glorious action.[39]

In gratifying detail, Trumbull recorded one of the few contributions Madison made to the Capitol's evolution. His decision in favor of full-size figures established the scale of Trumbull's works as well as those to follow. Small studies were displayed in the Brick Capitol and, according to *The National Intellegencer,* gave every indication that the paintings would be a "credit to the artist and to his country" when finished.[40]

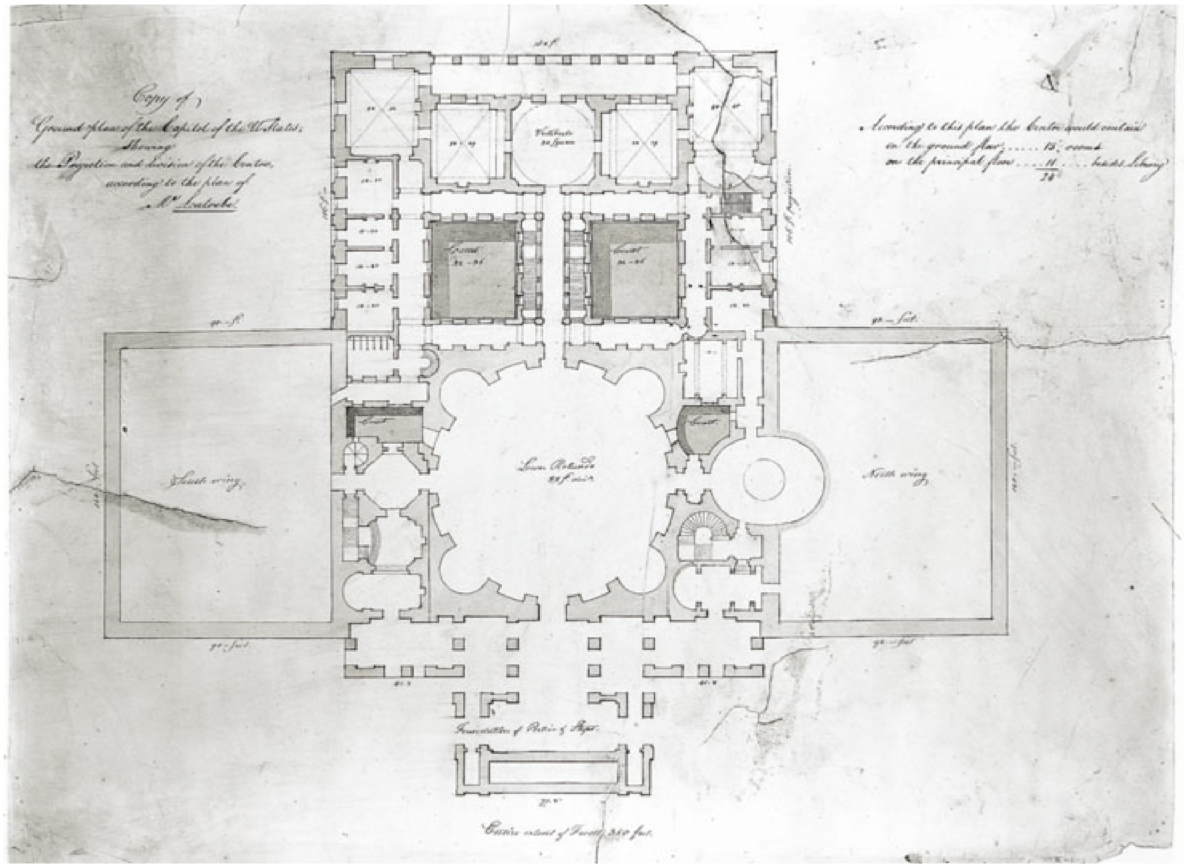
Latrobe, who was still in office at the time, was pleased by the congressional action that promised great works of art for the rotunda, telling Trumbull that he was "honored in having my Walls destined to support your paintings."[41] But determining how they would be displayed was another matter. Latrobe worried about the paintings hanging within reach because the canvases could be damaged by poking fingers or walking sticks. If hung too high, they would have to be tilted and would block views of sculpture he planned to install above. Should the canvases be stretched on frames to follow the curve of the walls? Or would it be better to have them stretched flat and straight? Letters passed between the architect and artist discussing these matters, with Trumbull first in favor of hanging the paintings in straight frames from bronze rings with the bottoms about twenty-two feet above the floor.[42] Latrobe countered with a suggestion to insert the pictures on ledges built into the walls leaving enough room for wooden frames. They would stand almost six feet off the floor and could be guarded by iron railings.[43] While Trumbull thought about Latrobe's proposal, the architect's career in Washington was falling apart around him. Six weeks after writing Trumbull, Latrobe had resigned his position. Hanging Trumbull's paintings was now Bulfinch's job.

During his first few weeks at the Capitol, Bulfinch tackled the problem of reconciling the need for committee rooms with the importance of providing a suitable place for Trumbull's paintings. On January 19, 1818, he wrote the artist (a friend of twenty years) with an idea of replacing the rotunda with committee rooms on the principal floor and placing a picture gallery in the story above. Access to the gallery would be provided by a striking double circular staircase like the one he admired in New York's new city hall, and the works of art would hang opposite windows facing east under the central portico. Trumbull, however, considered this placement highly objectionable. After describing a similar situation at the Louvre in Paris, which he thought "execrable," he lamented: "I should be deeply mortified, if, having devoted my life to recording the great events of the Revolution, my paintings, when finished, should be placed in a disadvantageous light. In truth, my dear friend, it would paralyze my exertions."[44] He urged Bulfinch to retain the rotunda on the strength of its serving as a perfect place to show his paintings. Trumbull suggested protecting the paintings by placing downward-leading staircases in front of them. Having a stairwell in front would put the paintings out of reach, and access to the rotunda would be easier and more accommodating for sightseers.

The suggestion did not please Bulfinch, who was not particularly happy with his initial idea either. Fortunately, by mid-March he hit upon a solution to provide enough committee rooms to save the rotunda. The center section would take advantage of the sloping hill on which it was to be built, rising four stories on the west while remaining three stories on the east. A new ground floor in the western projection could provide twelve committee rooms and offices. By reducing the size of light wells, corridors, and the rooms themselves, he was able to increase the number of rooms in that part of the center building from the twenty-four shown in Latrobe's plan to forty. They could also be fitted into a smaller and less expensive structure.

To facilitate a fair comparison, Bulfinch drew a plan showing his ideas along with a copy of Latrobe's plan. Solomon Willard of Boston was employed to build a scale model of the building with exchangeable parts illustrating the differences between the two plans. Both the drawings and model would assist the president and committees of Congress in making a decision. Yet one design problem still preyed on Bulfinch's mind. Although it would be seen only from the west, the additional story was sunk below the ground level of the wings, resulting in an odd composition. It would not be strange to see a four-story building flanked by lower three-story wings, but in Bulfinch's design the wings were not lower than the center building, and the oddity might subject him and the Capitol to criticism. To make the extra floor less obvious, Bulfinch planned to face it with granite from Boston, thus leaving the line of brownish freestone unbroken.[45] Writing with news of his plan, he asked Trumbull to recall a similar situation that might be cited as a precedent.[46] The artist was delighted with the idea and assured Bulfinch that the benefits to be gained from this plan were worth enduring a minor architectural idiosyncracy:

> It appears to me, that you have extricated yourself most happily from the multitude of

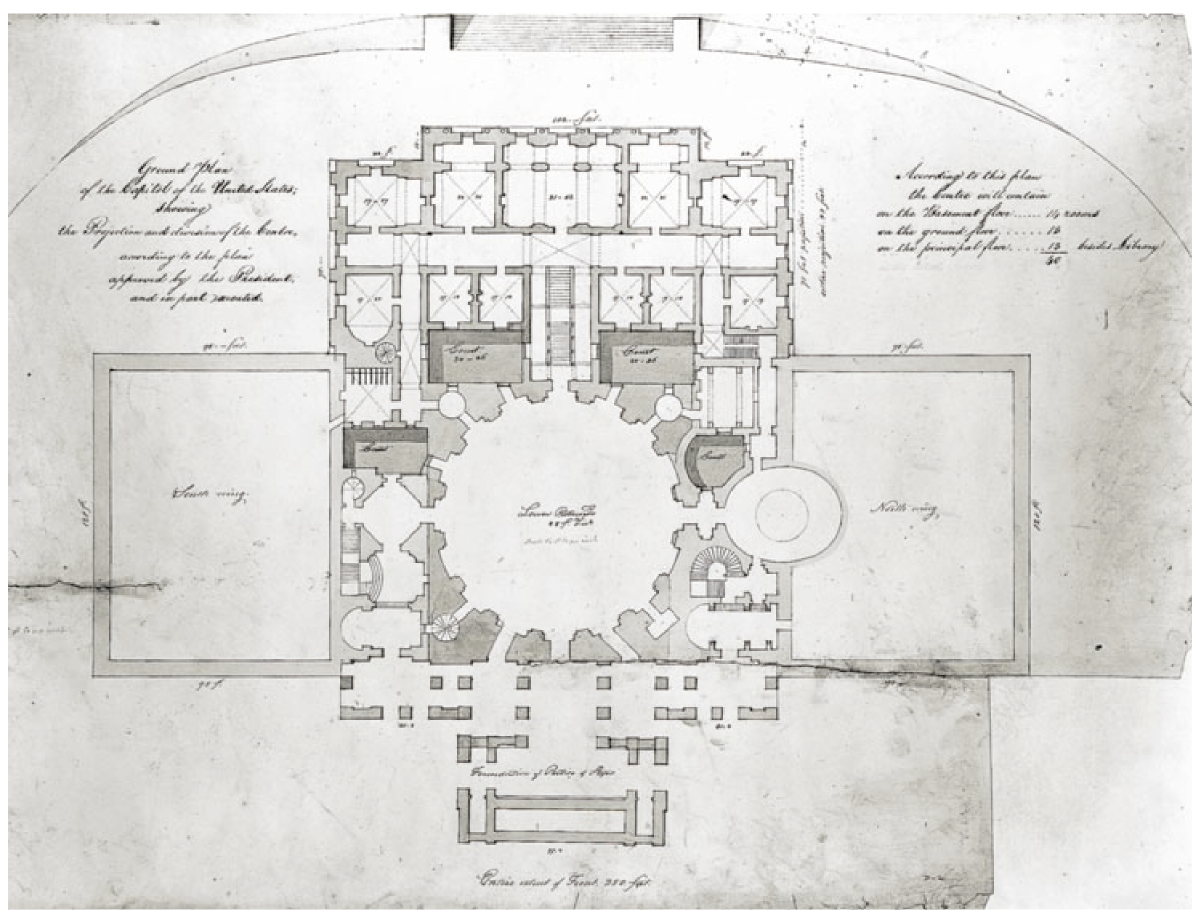


Copy of Ground plan of the Capitol showing the Projection and division of the Center according to the plan of Mr. Latrobe

by Charles Bulfinch, ca. 1818

Library of Congress

In Latrobe's preliminary plan, the west center building projected 106 feet beyond the face of the wings and accommodated twenty-four committee rooms and the Library of Congress.

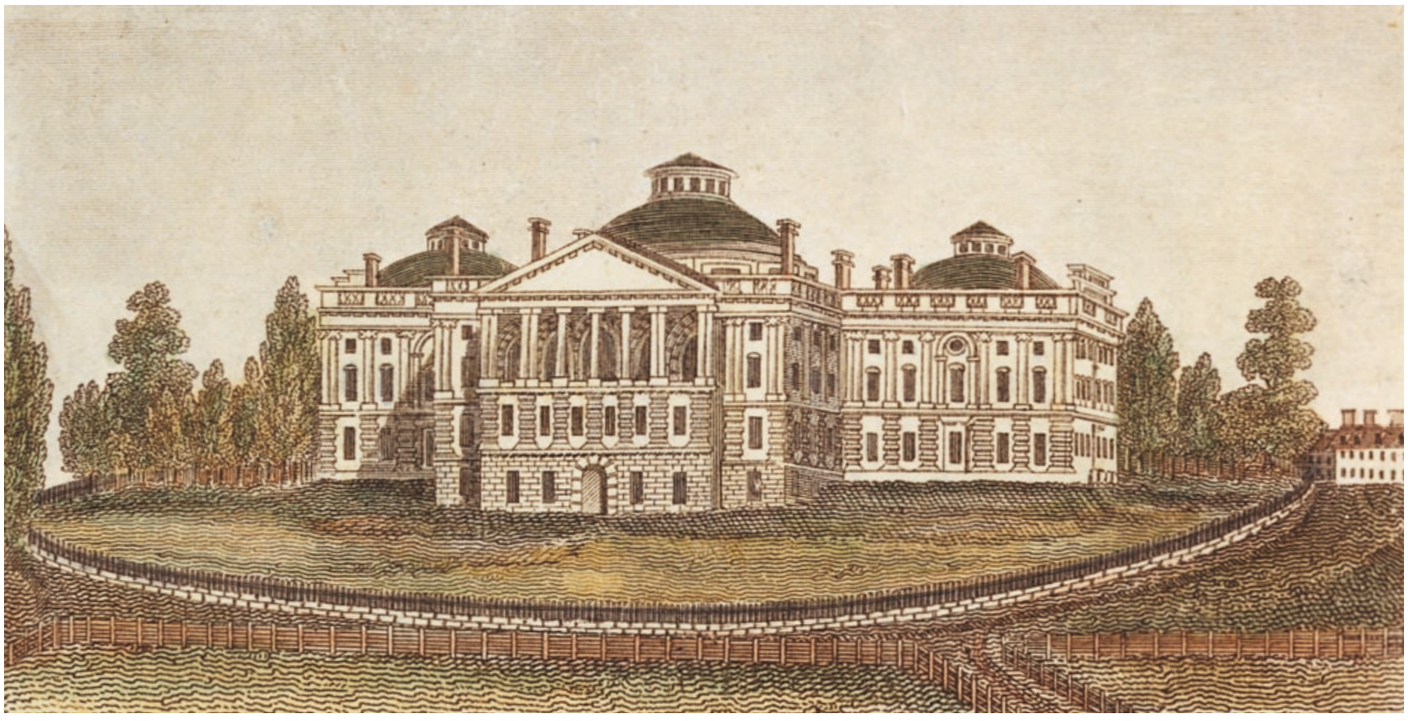


Ground plan of the Capitol of the United States showing the Projection and division of the Center according to the Plan approved by the President and in part erected

by Charles Bulfinch, ca. 1818

Library of Congress

With an extra floor at the basement level, Bulfinch's west center building accommodated forty committee rooms and the Library of Congress, yet projected thirty-five feet less than Latrobe's plan.



A back View of the Capitol
by P. Price, 1827

Although drawn after the center building was completed, this view shows a pediment over the west portico—a feature that never existed. Yet the drawing accurately illustrates the architectural dilemma facing Bulfinch when he designed a four-story center building between three-story wings. The extra story at the bottom of the center building was both peculiar and unprecedented. The problem was solved by building a terrace, which gave the Capitol a uniform ground line when viewed from the Mall.

> contradictory projects with which you were surrounded. The granite basement is, I presume, original; I cannot recollect any example of the kind, nor do I find any among a collection of views of country seats in England, which I have . . . the necessity of the case justifies the novelty; and nothing can be easier than to disguise it by what the English call planting it out, that is, screening it from distant view by shrubs.[47]

By the end of March 1818, Bulfinch's plan for the center building had been approved, and the initial funding of $100,000 was given on April 20. During the building season most workmen were employed on the two wings, but those who could be spared began removing the old center foundations left from the 1790s. Much of the hill was cut away to prepare the site for the western projection and its new foundations. On the fourth anniversary of the burning of the Capitol, August 24, 1818, the cornerstone of the center building was laid. Although the ceremony was conducted without a fanfare, the symbolism of the event was inescapable. *The National Intelligencer* reported:

> The cornerstone of the Capitol of the United States was laid at 12 o'clock on Monday last, the 24th inst. in the presence of the Commissioner of the Public Buildings, and the Architect of the Capitol; after which the workmen and labors employed about the building partook of refreshments, provided by direction of the Commissioner.
>
> This ceremony took place, it will be recollected, on the anniversary of that day, on which a barbarous enemy here made war upon the arts, upon literature, and upon civilized laws, and hoped to perpetuate his infamous exploit, by laying in a heap of irreparable ruins the edifices raised by taste and genius to the peaceful purposes of legislation and the promotion of human knowledge and happiness.[48]

At the end of the 1818 building season, Bulfinch reported that the foundations of the basement story had been laid, the cellar walls under the crypt (sometimes called the "lower rotunda") were ready for the arches to carry its floor, and walls and partitions of the lower story were begun.[49] By the end of September of the next year, the walls were up to the level of the principal floor, and there was enough sandstone on hand to reach the eaves. Blue stone was bought to back the "angles" of the rotunda and two million bricks were ordered for walls and arches. When not building centers, carpenters spent the winter making doors, shutters, and window sash that would be installed later.[50]

The Crypt

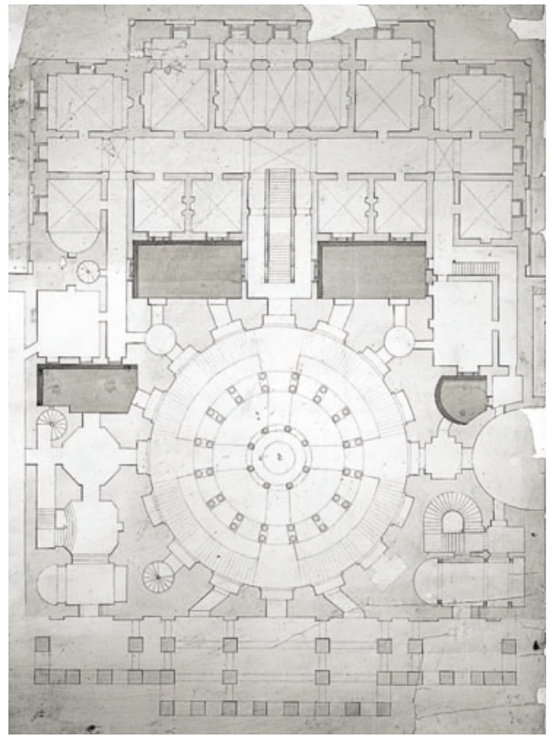
Except for modern lighting fixtures and display cases, the crypt remains today as Bulfinch built it. Forty sturdy columns help support the floor of the rotunda above. (1981 photograph.)

Ionic Order
by Charles Bulfinch, ca.1822

Bulfinch's manipulation of interior ornamentation tended to be more delicate and decorative than Latrobe's bold but simple trim. Evidence of this taste may be seen in the woodwork and stone carving done under Bulfinch's supervision. Traces of white paint removed in the early twentieth century are visible in this view of a Bulfinch capital. (1964 photograph.)

Plan of the First Floor, Center Building
by Charles Bulfinch, ca. 1818
Library of Congress

In this preliminary plan, Bulfinch indicated four staircases in the crypt leading to the rotunda above. These were suggested by John Trumbull as one way to protect his Revolutionary War paintings, which would hang out of reach above the stairwells. While the stair idea was never carried out, the crypt's forty columns were erected as indicated. The committee rooms, passages, and stairs west of the crypt were also constructed as shown.



Western Staircase

Latrobe's staircases were often criticized for being hard to find, poorly lighted, and steep— shortcomings Bulfinch studiously avoided in his designs. Placed on axis with the principal western doorway, this stair leads directly to the rotunda entrance.

In 1900 the original sandstone treads were replaced with marble and the iron railing was replaced with a bronze replica. At the same time the black and white marble floor was laid using refuse tile from the dismantled Library of Congress located on the floor above. (ca. 1960 photograph.)

CONGRESS RETURNS TO THE CAPITOL

The first session of the 16th Congress convened on December 6, 1819, in the restored wings of the Capitol. While veteran members were delighted to be out of the spare quarters in the Brick Capitol and back in their magnificent chambers across the street, they were greeted with the distressing news that the appropriation had been overspent. In the rush to complete the wings, Lane was obliged to tap funds specified for other purposes, but he still did not have enough money to cover expenses. The story was remarkably similar to Latrobe's push in 1807 to seat the House in its new chamber, during which time he incurred both debt and Jefferson's anger. Yet unlike Latrobe, Lane presented his dilemma to the president, who approved a scheme to borrow funds from a local bank to assure completion of the work. The loan brought in $50,000 and juggling accounts provided another $49,100.[51] All totaled, there was a $75,000 deficit to report to Congress. On December 15, 1819, Bulfinch wrote an account of money spent on the Capitol not covered in earlier estimates. The marble for the Senate gallery, for instance, had been estimated to cost $15,000 but had exceeded that sum by $6,375. Glass cost $5,300 more than expected, and mantels from Italy were $600 over budget, but the largest unforseen overrun was for Potomac marble. It was first estimated at $28,000 but had in fact cost more than $58,000 for the year.

Another unexpected expense was the three thousand dollars spent to paint the outside walls in 1819. The Aquia Creek sandstone was found to be susceptible to cracking and spallation due to the action of rain and frost, and paint was the only coating that could protect it. Every workman who handled the stone knew it was unpredictable and liable to fall apart without warning; a few of its more annoying characteristics were described in an extensive account of the stone that Latrobe had written years earlier:

> The Quality of the stone is also in other respects various. Of the stone more even in its grain & texture, most pleasant to work and of the most durable appearance, great part cracks and falls to pieces on exposure to the air & sun. Sometimes contrary to all expectations & appearance the frost tears it to pieces. All of it expands when wet, and contracts when dry. This property it seems never to lose though buried ever so long in the Walls of a building, unless, as at the Capitol it is contracted by the excessive weight of the incumbent mass. But in any part of a work in which it lies at liberty at one or both ends, the joints regularly open in dry & close in wet weather. Window and door sills therefore which are confined at both ends & are open in the Middle, generally break and the fissure opens and shuts with the dryness or moisture of the weather, to the amount of the 10th of an inch in six feet.[52]

Paint could protect the stone from the weather, or so Bulfinch thought, and would cover blemishes that disfigured many blocks of Aquia sandstone. Ever since the first stones were delivered in 1795, careful attention had been paid to color and quality. Stones with imperfections such as rust-colored streaks would not be used on the exterior but would be buried in walls or sent to the President's House, where the exterior was whitewashed. Latrobe spent the early days of his second campaign at the Capitol supervising the cleaning of the exterior stone that was scarred by smoke and flames from the fire. Bulfinch's decision to try preserving the walls of the wings with a coat of paint meant that blemished freestone could now be used because paint would hide cosmetic defects. Stone used for the center building would not need to conform to the high standards previously held for Capitol stonework, and with less of it subject to rejection, the work on the center building would be accelerated.

Money borrowed to buy marble, glass, mantels, and paint needed to be repaid. For an hour, the House debated the deficit, focusing not so much on whether it should be covered as on the circumstances under which it was incurred. John Randolph attacked the president for running up debt without the constitutional power "to pledge Congress to make good sums which he should raise and expend, without the authority of law."[53] He had made much the same argument against the deficit incurred in 1807 and now was joined by a fellow Virginian, James Johnson, in condemning this one. A half-dozen members spoke favorably of the doctrine espoused by Randolph but supported the president, who was following the congressional mandate to finish the wings. Monroe had only done his duty. On a voice vote, the funds necessary to

View of the Capitol Looking Southeast

by Michael Esperance de Hersant, ca. 1819

Private Collection, Reproduced by permission

Views of the center building under construction are scarce. This sketch shows the Capitol when only the lower two floors of the western projection were completed. A cluster of workmen's houses may be seen in the foreground.

cover the deficit were appropriated on January 24, 1820. It passed the Senate and was approved by the president a few days later.[54]

Also in 1820 a small appropriation was made to paint the inside of the wings and a large sum was given to continue construction of the center building. The next season's work included setting stone for the walls of the western projection, beginning the eastern walls, and raising the columns in the crypt. Six hundred tons of sandstone was needed for building the rotunda the next year. Also needed were two million bricks and roofing materials. Corinthian capitals for outside columns and pilasters were to be carved. In all, Bulfinch estimated that $111,769 worth of work would be performed on the center building, and on April 11, 1820, Congress granted the amount requested.[55] Despite the deficit, there was little unhappiness in Congress with the management of the works at the Capitol.

After sitting in its new hall a few months, however, the House of Representatives became painfully aware of the room's singular defect. Like the old hall, this one suffered from dreadful acoustics. In very short order the chamber was found to be a terrible room for debate, a room in which a voice might be inaudible to members seated nearby and a reverberating babble to those farther away. The smooth, arched ceiling was the culprit, acting as a sounding board that redirected voices with bewildering effects. On April 12, 1820, the chairman of the Committee on Public Buildings, Thomas W. Cobb of Georgia, wrote Lane to ask for a solution. This was the first of many such requests that would follow over the next thirty years as successive Congresses grappled with a problem that was not well understood. Lane asked Bulfinch to consider how the acoustics could be improved, and he asked James Hoban the same question. Dr. Thornton was also asked to give his

Night Session in the House

by Samuel F. B. Morse, 1822

The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.
Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund

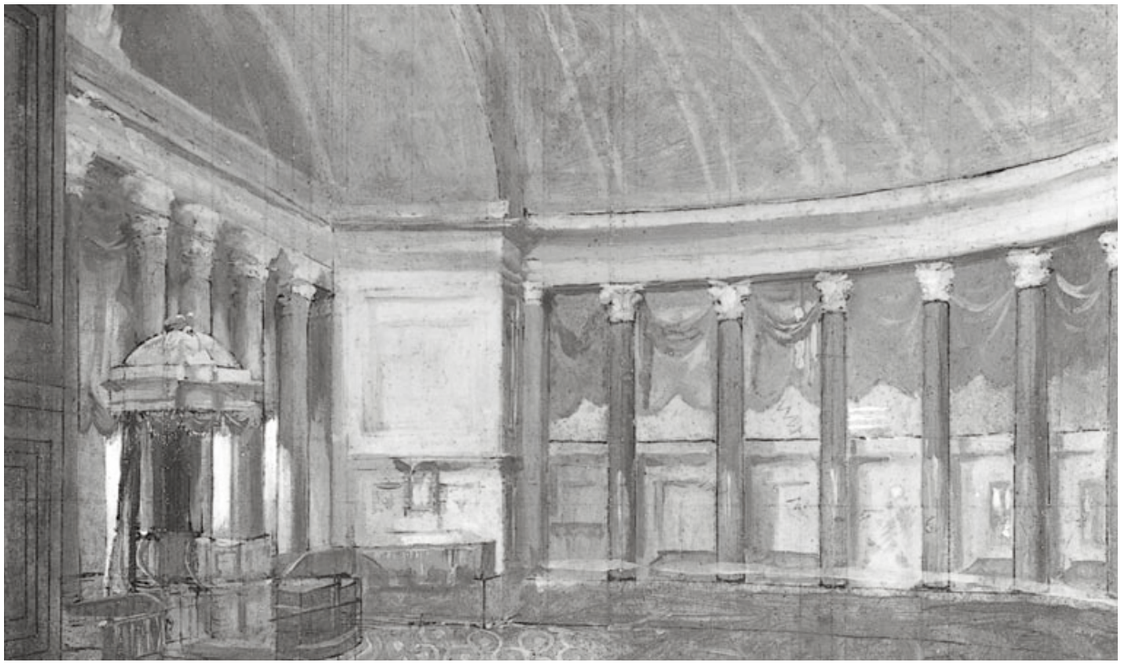
No painting of a Capitol interior surpasses Morse's depiction of the House of Representatives preparing for an evening session. The chamber glows under oil lamps being lighted by the clerk and his assistants while members gather beneath the great wooden dome. Then as now, the sweeping colonnade was the room's most distinguished feature.

opinions on the subject, which came in a long letter.[56] In his epistle Thornton recited the acoustical virtues of an elliptical hall, following it with a scathing history of the first chamber. He blamed Latrobe for altering the ellipse into semicircles that reverberated sound. Thornton then claimed that he came up with the idea for muffling echoes with curtains and thus solved the problem in the former hall. "I hoped the first member of Congress that should rise," he wrote bitterly, "would give a curtain lecture to the presumptuous & innovating architect." The second hall, in which Congress now sat, had identical problems: "The same Errors have been repeated & we still find nothing but segments of circles." His solution this time was covering the gallery fronts with woolen cloth dipped in arsenic to protect it from moths. If echoes persisted, he suggested another covering of lethal wool for the ceiling.

Having addressed the main subject of Lane's inquiry, Thornton then attacked Bulfinch for

following Latrobe's alterations of the Capitol's original design. The spacing of the columns along the south side of the House chamber was, in Thornton's opinion, "sickening," but he thought the colonnade could be taken down and re-erected without disturbing the entablature. He did not suggest how this could be accomplished but admitted that it would require "great care." (Apparently, Thornton did not recognize that the interior intercolumniation mirrored that on the exterior and was governed by it.) The center building would be "universally condemned," Thornton warned, unless the circular conference room was built and the subbasement abandoned. Every departure from the old design was condemned with Thornton's gifts of sarcasm and exaggeration. The monitor on the roof feeding light and air to skylights above the Senate chamber was "borrowed from some carpenter's shop, for there never was so mean a window exhibited before in any public building on the face of the globe." The dwarf columns and the upper gallery in the Senate were "perfectly fantastic," reminding Thornton of the platform at London's Newgate prison "where the convicts are executed wholesale, for never were such galleries seen in any building of dignity and national grandeur." Access to the Senate galleries was likened to an Italian mule path. On the exterior, the Capitol's three domes would strike the eye of a "chaste architect" as ridiculous, and would recall "the old-fashioned Tea Canisters, Bohea at one end, Green Tea at the other, and in the center the large sugar dish." Thornton's letter made it clear that his bitterness had not been soothed by time, and his pretensions to architectural authority were as delusional as ever.

Bulfinch proposed three ways to cure the hall of its acoustical ailment: raising the floor, building a glass partition behind the last row of desks, or installing a flat ceiling.[57] Building up the floor promised to be the least effective because, as Bulfinch noted, the confusion of sounds was the fault of the high, smooth ceiling. The glass partition would also do little good unless it was built so high that it would prevent visitors in the gallery from hearing the proceedings. On the other hand, a new flat ceiling would reduce the room's height by twenty feet and would check much of the reverberation and echo. To avoid obstructing the beautiful dome, and permit the lantern still to light the room, Bulfinch proposed making the ceiling of glass held in a gilded framework. The glass ceiling would cost $5,000.



Study for *Night Session in the House*

by Samuel F. B. Morse
ca. 1822

National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Museum Purchase through a grant from the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation

Some members looked to the center building as a place to build an entirely new hall of the House. They asked if that was a good idea and Bulfinch replied that it was not. The library, at ninety-two feet long and thirty-four feet wide, was the largest room in the center building yet was still too small for the House. It was even smaller than the House chamber in the Brick Capitol (which measured eighty by forty-six feet) and could not be arranged nearly as well for desks and chairs. Galleries could be only installed at the ends of the room, and they would be small and inconvenient. And although the walls were almost finished it would take another two years for the room to be ready for use. Bulfinch thought members were becoming accustomed to the chamber and that once they knew the pitch of voice necessary to be heard, many objections to it would be removed. He recommended that members address the House from selected stations instead of from their desks and noted that when the room was used for religious services the preacher was clearly understood in every part of the hall. Admittedly, this was perhaps due to the solemnity of a worship service.

On January 19, 1821, Congressman Silas Wood of New York, chairman of the Committee on Public Buildings, issued a report on the various proposals to defeat echoes in the chamber. The glass ceiling was thought to be the best solution, but it would greatly injure the beauty of the room. The committee found that it was easier to be heard now than formerly because, it believed, the walls were dryer. As the room became more and more dry, they were sure, the acoustics would continue to improve. The only action recommended was carpeting the galleries to muffle the sounds there.[58]

Wood's committee also made a second report, this one looking into the wisdom of decreasing the annual appropriation for construction of the center building.[59] The economic depression following the Panic of 1819 gripped the country and put heavy strains on the treasury. Some in Congress thought curtailing construction was an appropriate response to the country's financial difficulties. The committee, however, found that depressed prices of materials and labor meant savings, while diminishing the building funds would only mean slower progress, and they did not believe funds should be reduced until the walls were finished and the center building put under roof. Wood's report recommended an appropriation of $80,000 for the 1821 building season to supplement $26,000 unexpended from previous years. When the appropriation passed, it also directed that all unexpended balances left over from any other public building be applied to the completion of the Capitol's center building. President Monroe approved the appropriation on March 2, 1821.

At the time of the appropriation, 126 men were at work on the center building. Eight were carving blocks of sandstone for the entablature and Corinthian capitals; forty were cutting stone for the walls and drums that would make up the column shafts for the western portico; twenty- one carpenters were making doors, window sash, and frames; and fifty-seven laborers worked at a variety of backbreaking tasks such as hauling and hoisting stone. In April masons began laying brick and stone and in July coppersmiths began covering the roof. At the height of the building season, nearly 230 hands were at work, a number that dropped to eighty-one by December. Illness among the workmen prevented the western projection from being finished in 1821, but the goal was not missed by much. Walls were finished and the roof covered except for a small portion over the library. Although chimneys were unfinished and some ornamental carving was needed, when viewed from the west the Capitol appeared virtually complete. From the east, however, it was far from finished. The walls of the rotunda, both interior and exterior, were up but there were no signs yet of either the dome or the eastern portico.

THE BULFINCH DOME

The Capitol's crowning dome was one of Bulfinch's most difficult and important designs. On his initial visit with Dr. Thornton, he was shown the original elevation approved by George Washington, who was particularly fond of its low, graceful dome. The president may have been reminded of engraved views of the Pantheon in Rome and was pleased by the associations with the world of ancient Roman virtue and greatness, but he could not have compared it with anything he had ever seen in person. In 1793 the only domes in the United States were drawings on

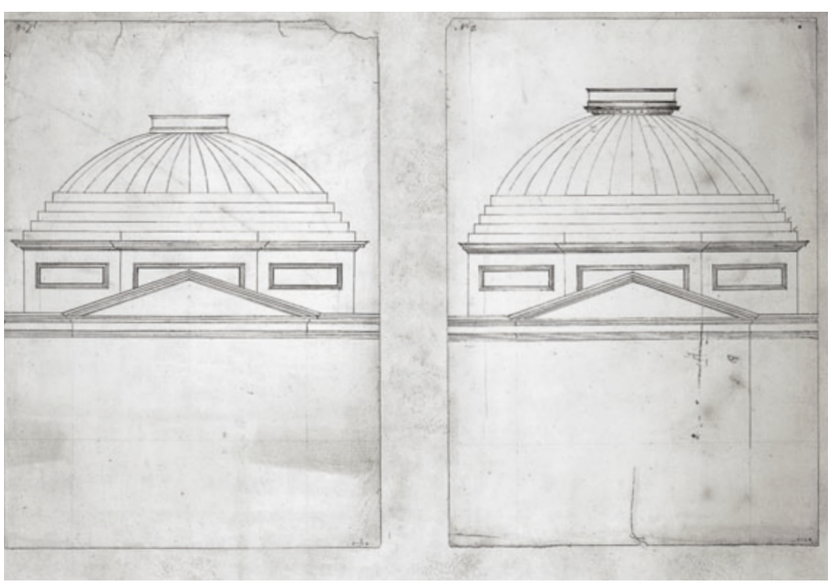
paper. Indeed, Bulfinch himself constructed the first dome in the country at the Massachusetts Statehouse, which he designed in 1787. Washington probably had seen small, dome-like roofs on garden pavilions but it is more likely that he never saw a classical dome except in illustrated form.

Thornton's elevation of the Capitol showed a dome rising on a platform of six steps in front of a central portico. The first revision to this design was undertaken by Latrobe during the Jefferson administration to solve a fundamental problem. Unless the dome was raised on a drum, the platform would rise awkwardly from the gable of the pediment, creating a disturbing juxtaposition of intersecting, incompatible shapes. Adding a drum gave the pediment a place to stop and the dome a place to begin. Latrobe's drawings from this period showed variations on this solution, including an octagonal drum with sculptural panels. All of Latrobe's drawings showed that he intended to preserve the idea of a low, neoclassical dome.

Bulfinch's studies for the dome illustrate a preference for a drum with panels but without sculpture (unless he simply chose not to draw sculpture). He may have preferred a higher dome than either Thornton or Latrobe or may have drawn higher domes in response to outside suggestions. Certainly events forced him to build one higher than his taste or judgment would have otherwise allowed. In 1842, long retired from public life, Bulfinch wrote an account of the political process twenty years earlier that led to a tall dome, one that was frequently ridiculed. Defending his good name, Bulfinch wished to set the record straight for the sake of his family:

> Upon my taking charge of the Capitol, I found a number of drawings of the manner in which it was intended to finish it, but it was very difficult to give the Building Committee [Swift and Bomford] any clear ideas upon the subject, and absolutely impossible to convey the same to the more numerous body of the members of Congress. I accordingly proposed to have a model made to show the building in its completed state. This was made and inspected by the President and all the members of Congress and I believe had a favorable effect in convincing them that I understood what work I had to do, and that there was some prospect of the building being finished. But there was one universal remark, that the Dome was *too low,* perhaps from a vague idea that there was something bold and picturesque in a *lofty dome.* As the work proceeded I prepared drawings for domes of different elevations, and, by way of comparison, one of a greater height than the one I should have preferred: they were laid before the Cabinet, and the loftiest one selected, even a wish expressed that it might be raised higher in a Gothic form, but this was too inconsistent with the style of the building to be at all thought of by me.[60]

Like Latrobe before him, Bulfinch found his professional judgment overruled by those in charge



Dome Studies

by Charles Bulfinch
ca. 1822

Library of Congress

These drawings illustrate Bulfinch's early thoughts about the height and profile of the Capitol's dome. President Monroe and his cabinet, however, wanted it built higher.

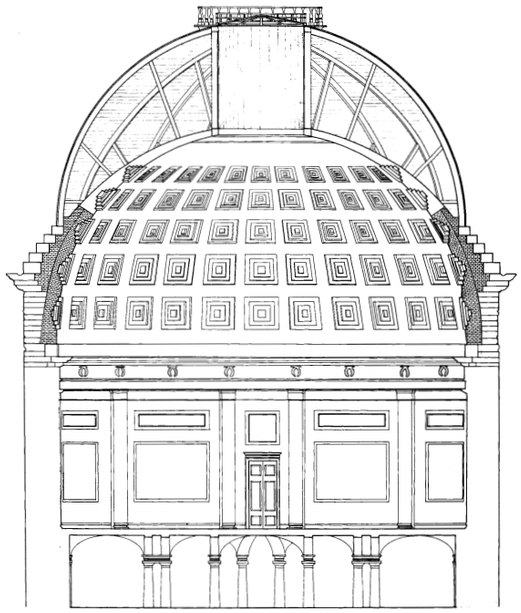
for reasons at odds with his taste and experience. Unlike his predecessor, however, Bulfinch bore the command in silence. He knew the decision was irrevocable and to avoid unpleasantness he yielded the point. The disparaging remarks made about the height of the dome were of little consequence to Bulfinch, who wrote philosophically: "Architects expect criticism and must learn to bear it patiently."

In making his funding request for the 1822 building season, Bulfinch submitted a "Comparative view of the expense of a Dome of Brick and of Stone."[61] A brick dome required considerable carpentry for the centering, 600,000 bricks, and 180 tons of stone for a bond course. Copper, painting, and plastering brought the total estimated cost of a brick dome to $25,000. For a stone dome, $20,000 would be needed to purchase freestone and another $35,700 to cut, shape, and install it. Copper and paint brought the estimated cost of the stone dome to a little more than $60,000. By way of comparison, Bulfinch appended an estimate of almost $20,000 for a wooden dome, which made the cost of a fireproof brick dome seem all the more reasonable. He preferred a brick dome and included it in his request for 1822.

It appears that none of the estimates Bulfinch presented to Congress anticipated building a double dome. The figures given for the two masonry structures included an amount for an exterior covering of copper ($4,500 in both cases), but there was no mention of a separate roof structure for an outer dome. Soon after the estimates were given, the call for a high dome forced the architect to design a double dome—one over the rotunda and another to be seen from the outside. The interior dome would rise ninety-six feet above the floor and cover a room ninety-six feet in diameter. Thus, the rotunda would imitate the classical proportions of the Pantheon in Rome, the interior of which is also as high as it is wide. But for the exterior, Bulfinch devised a separate wooden structure rising 140 feet above the ground (seventy feet above the top of the building), giving the Capitol the visibility that politicians wanted.

On May 1, 1822, the president approved an appropriation of $120,000 for the center building. During the building season, the outside of the western projection was finished, its walls painted, sashes installed, and the copper roof completed. Inside, most of the plaster had been troweled and carpentry was greatly advanced. Most of the season's efforts were directed at building the dome. The sandstone walls of the rotunda were completed soon after the appropriation passed and the interior dome was finished before the close of the year's work. Rough boards served as temporary flooring until the paving stone was set the following year. About two-thirds of the inner dome was constructed of stone and brick, while the upper third was wood. At the crown, an oculus twenty-four feet in diameter provided the room with light. The outside dome was also finished except for the copper covering, which would be installed the next year. Upon seeing the outer dome framed and sheathed, Bulfinch realized that his fears regarding the aesthetics of its height and profile were fully justified. He mentioned to the commissioner that lowering the dome now would also lower the cost of copper, but he was rebuffed. In the past, arguments of economy had usually prevailed, but in the case of the Capitol's dome, nothing could persuade the authorities to abandon its disproportionately tall profile.

In this case the intransigent commissioner was not Samuel Lane, who died in the spring of 1822, but his successor, Joseph Elgar, who had been a clerk in Lane's office. President Monroe appointed Elgar on May 8, 1822, after Congress rejected a proposal to blend the commissioner's office with that of the "principal Architect." A committee of



Section of the Rotunda and Dome As Completed by Bulfinch

Conjectural Reconstruction, 1989

The Capitol's outer dome rose 140 feet above the ground while the interior retained the pleasing proportions of the Pantheon. The rotunda was made ninety-six feet high to match its diameter exactly.

the House had been appointed to study the matter and reported its findings on April 8, 1822. The report traced the history of the commissioner's office back to the Residence Act of 1790 and through its various incarnations as a one-person post and a three-man board. Among the duties of the position were selecting workmen (including the architect), determining their pay, inspecting plans, and superintending the work. Like positions for carpenters or bricklayers, that of architect was created out of a temporary necessity. When the buildings were completed, the commissioner would dispense with the architect. The committee therefore recommended that the offices continue separate and distinct but recommended the salary of the commissioner be reduced by $500 a year because his duties were "less arduous than they formerly were."[62]

The economic strains brought on by the Panic of 1819 were still being felt three years later. Elgar was not the only government officer to see his salary cut as a general reduction of pay was ordered throughout the bureaucracy to take effect at the end of 1822. On September 30, Elgar informed Bulfinch that his salary would be reduced $500 a year. Bulfinch immediately appealed the matter to the attorney general, who claimed to be too busy to decide the case right away. Falling back on his Massachusetts connections, Bulfinch asked Secretary of State John Quincy Adams to intervene. The architect considered his relationship to the government as a matter ruled by an implied contract that could not be altered unless both parties agreed to a change. He reminded Adams that his pay was less than the states of Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina allowed their civil engineers and much less than the salary given the head engineer at the Susquehanna and Schuylkill canal. Family obligations made it impossible to accept a reduction in income. His style of living was "prudent" and a reduction in pay would be "irksome and humiliating."[63]

In a few days Monroe asked the attorney general to spare five minutes to consider "whether the invitation to him to come here at a given salary formed a contract not to be altered."[64] William Wirt upheld Bulfinch's view of his contractual relationship with the government and stated that it was "unalterable by the mere will of either party."[65] His salary could not be and was not reduced.

On March 3, 1823, the last day of the 17th Congress, the president approved an appropriation of $100,000 for the center building.[66] During the building season, much of the interior was finished and only a few details remained incomplete by year's end. On April 26 Elgar ordered four blocks of marble fourteen feet long and twenty inches square from Thomas and Joseph Symington of Baltimore for the columns needed in the Library of Congress. Bulfinch designed the columns after the Tower of the Winds. Each capital took about forty days to carve and all were finished by the first week in September. The commissioner allowed eighty dollars each for three capitals, but one carved by a Mr. Joyce was not as good and his compensation was docked ten dollars.[67] The library was designed to hold 40,000 books arranged in deep alcoves on the main level and in shallow alcoves reached by means of a narrow balcony. A gracefully arched ceiling was laid out in panels with plaster decorations, with three circular skylights to supplement light and air received through four arched windows.

Copper was installed over the wooden sheathing covering the outside dome and most of the stone pavers (but not all) were laid on the rotunda floor. Except for those on the third floor, the committee rooms and offices in the western projection were finished. The clerk of the House of Representatives moved into his suite on the second floor in mid-October. Alterations in the House chamber increased seating capacity from 192 to 216. More floor space was gained by removing two stone platforms extending from the south colonnade, and some single desks were joined to accommodate two members. The alterations were necessary to accommodate an increase in the membership of the House following the 1820 census.

THE EAST PORTICO

Perhaps the most visible sign of progress made in 1823 was the start of the grand portico on the east front. Left to the last, the portico would bring the outside of the Capitol to a fitting conclusion after so many years of fitful construction. Like that of the dome, the design of the portico was derived from Thornton's original elevation as modified by Latrobe and

West Portico

Detail of a ca. 1890 photograph

From 1824 until 1897 the Library of Congress was located behind the west portico. The sculpted panels at the third-floor level were converted into windows in 1900, when the library space was rebuilt into offices and committee rooms.

With four sets of coupled columns and the absence of a pediment, Bulfinch's design of the Capitol's west portico recalled his design for the Massachusetts Statehouse portico. Neither shelters a major entrance, but they both provide pleasant vantage points for admiring city and water views.

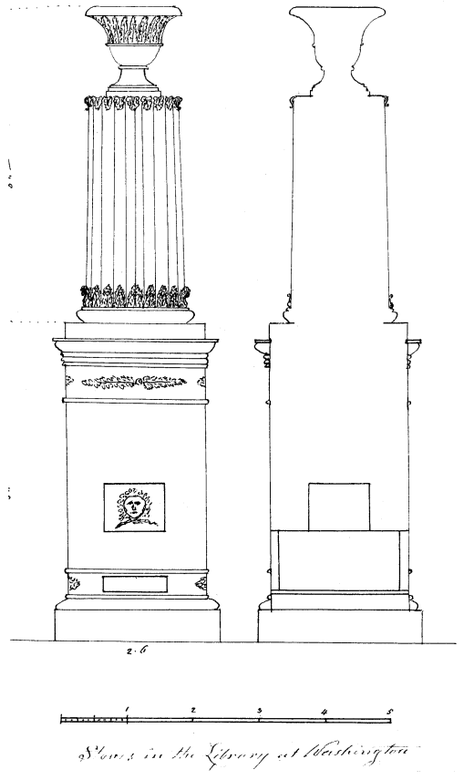
The Capitol's west portico appears to be an example of post and lintel construction, yet the columns actually support brick arches. Five arches spring from iron beams held by the columns and their corresponding pilasters. (The entablature and the portico's plaster ceiling screen the arcade from view.) Although somewhat deceiving, this mode of construction was simple, economical, sturdy, and fireproof. It was also the earliest use of iron beams in the Capitol's construction history.

Stoves in the Library at Washington

by Charles Bulfinch, ca. 1824

Library of Congress

An urn and the partial column shaft on which it stands were classical images Bulfinch employed in this design for an iron stove. By using stoves, the Library of Congress was warmed without open fires. Despite this precaution, the room was damaged by fire in 1826 and completely burned out in 1851.



View, Congress Library Capitol, Washington

by Alexander Jackson Davis and Stephen H. Gimber, 1832

I. N. Phelps Stokes Collections, Mirian and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations

Bulfinch's most elegant and popular interior design was the reading room of the Library of Congress, finished in 1824. Comfortably furnished with sofas, chairs, and writing tables, the library was a favorite place to read, write, admire works of art, or enjoy the view.


CISM., THEORY

Bulfinch. Thornton's design for the east portico consisted of eight columns thirty feet tall standing on pedestals and a one-story arcade. The side elevations would each show two additional columns, bringing the total number to twelve. A rich entablature and a broad pediment with sculptural decoration completed the composition. To this basic design Latrobe added a monumental flight of stairs to land visitors on the principal level of the building. He increased the depth of the portico and extended it with colonnades to the corner of each wing. Attached to the corner of the north wing, Latrobe planned a square column to help buttress the interior vaulting. Considerations of symmetry demanded a similar (yet unnecessary) treatment at the south end of the portico. In addition to the two attached columns, Latrobe's portico design called for twenty-four conventional columns, twice as many as Thornton's scheme.

Aside from structural considerations, the alteration improved the use of the portico and the appearance of the building. Adding a flight of stairs allowed the portico to become the grand entrance instead of a balcony. The colonnades extended the portico over the recesses and helped unify the parts into a better defined unit. Instead of a five-part composition, the east front with Latrobe's portico appeared as one large building with a dominant central feature, trading a "staccato effect" for "an effect of crescendo."[68] The fact that the columns of the flanking colonnades could not line up with the existing pilasters of the recesses was a small sacrifice to the greater good offered by Latrobe's design for the east portico.

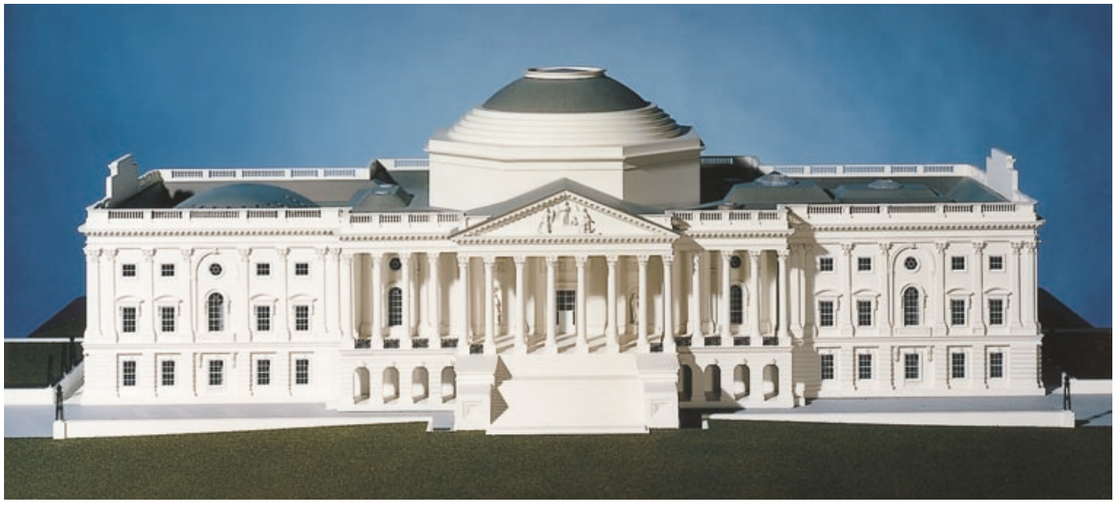
In 1806 Latrobe wrote that his portico design was taken—at Jefferson's suggestion—from Diocletian's portico that was illustrated in a drawing hanging in the President's House.[69] Because the view has been lost, it is uncertain where it came from or what it showed. There has been speculation that the mysterious portico may have actually been the Temple of the Signa illustrated in Robert Wood's *The Ruins of Palmyra,* published in London in 1753.[70] That elevation shows a portico with a pediment flanked by colonnades—features similar to the Capitol's portico. Although the attribution has been challenged, this drawing may have inspired Latrobe's design and given it the authority from antiquity that Jefferson found reassuring.[71]

Initially Bulfinch seemed to prefer Thornton's original portico design. But by the time work was begun in 1823, the simpler scheme had given way to Latrobe's grand design. The decision to build Latrobe's portico may have been made for the sake of grandeur or for structural reasons, but it was clearly made without considering cost. In another decision that defied economy, Commissioner Elgar directed that all column shafts were to be wrought from single blocks of stone instead of built up with drums, as was done with the west portico. Monolithic shafts would indeed contribute to the impression of perfection and grandeur, but their use was opposed for practical reasons by George Blagden, the venerable head of the stone cutting department.[72] In the fall Elgar and Blagden visited the quarries at Aquia, where they met Thomas Towson of Baltimore, who had been hired by the commissioner to quarry the shafts. (Towson had been one of the impartial judges who determined the value of the Potomac marble five years earlier.) There Towson convinced Elgar that he could extract blocks of sandstone large enough to supply the column shafts. While Blagden remained doubtful, Elgar ordered Towson to proceed.

In November Towson informed the commissioner that he had extracted the first shaft from the quarry.[73] The second and third quickly followed but remained on the island throughout the winter months. A fourth shaft was quarried in March 1824. Once navigation opened on the Potomac the shafts were transported by scow to Washington. The firm of Waller & Morton was paid two dollars a ton for freight.

As each block arrived in Washington, Blagden carefully inspected it. He found cracks and flaws in some stones and declared them unfit. He made no apologies for the anxiety he felt regarding the monoliths:

> I cannot divest myself of fear as respects the strength and durability of these stones and though I might feel much gratification and perhaps some pride as a workman in seeing to, and executing these shafts in one stone, yet to have a dread as to their Capacity which I do feel . . . it absorbs all other feelings and makes me feel miserable.[74]



Model of the Capitol with Portico and Dome Designs by Latrobe

In studies for completing the Capitol, Latrobe expanded the original portico design by adding flanking colonnades and a grand flight of steps. He also raised the dome upon a drum. When the dome was constructed by Bulfinch it was unlike the one shown here, but he built the portico according to his predecessor's design. (1994 photograph.)

Elgar wrote the quarry with hopes that future deliveries would prove acceptable. Otherwise, his expectations would be disappointed:

> If then there is not an absolute certainty of the Quarry having so far improved as to furnish shafts which cannot be objected to, the undertaking must be abandoned, and the columns be procured as heretofore. . . . Pray let me hear from you the moment you have matured your opinion upon this distressing subject.[75]

Towson insisted that the quarry could supply monoliths, but Blagden suffered fearful doubts. To resolve these conflicting opinions, Elgar asked Colonel William Stewart to go with Blagden to the quarry and decide the question. (Stewart had been Towson's fellow judge in the 1818 Potomac marble case.) On July 27, 1824, Stewart reported that he considered the stone of sufficient quality and quantity to supply each shaft in one block. He warned the commissioner, however, not to expect more than eighteen before the close of the season in November. In the middle of September Elgar heard that no more shafts could be expected for a month and he wrote Towson that this would "derange all calculations."[76] Thirteen shafts were delivered in 1824. They cost $296 apiece.

The rough column shafts for the east portico were delivered from the quarry to the Navy Yard on the Anacostia River. There they were unloaded and hauled by hand to Blagden's shop at the Capitol, where men transformed them into smooth, round shafts. According to an eyewitness account,

The Capitol At Washington
by C. A. Busby, 1823

Busby, an English architect, visited the Capitol in 1819, took measurements of the wings, and conferred with Bulfinch about plans for the center building. As seen here, Bulfinch considered returning to Thornton's original portico design, one without a grand stair or flanking colonnades. It also shows third-floor windows under the portico, possibly intended to light a picture gallery that was never built.

the appearance of these stones at the wharf was cause for much excitement and merriment:

> They are taken from the wharf, without the aid of horses, upon a strong carriage, with a hundred men pulling. Sometimes the members of Congress will turn out in the evening to assist 'the big wagon' and join in all the pleasantry to which the novelty gives rise. When the column arrives at the Capitol, it is cheered by loud huzzas . . . [among the workmen] there are perhaps not half a dozen sober men. They drink *scute* (as they call whiskey) on the job. When the day's work is ended, they hie to the grog shops and taverns to spend their earnings.[77]

Liquor was occasionally given workmen at the Capitol to mark special milestones or as an incentive to stay on the job in blistering weather. For example, sixteen and a half gallons of whiskey were "furnished the hands while handling the columns" on May 27, 1825.[78] A more extensive fete was provided by the commissioner as the columns were being put into place: on September 1, 1825, Robert Isherwood was paid "for treats furnished the hands while employed hauling and raising the columns." Three barrels of crackers and thirty-two wheels of cheese were washed down with twenty-six gallons of whiskey, one barrel of beer, and one gallon of brandy.[79]

While the shafts were being prepared, stone carvers working in Giovanni Andrei's shop produced the elaborate Corinthian capitals that were the most distinctive part of the columns. The carvers were guided by a full-scale model sculpted by Andrei in plaster of Paris. It was undoubtedly the same model used to prepare the capitals for the west front portico. While the rage for Grecian architecture was sweeping the country and most of the Capitol's interior columns were inspired by the antiquities of Athens, Andrei's model for the exterior column capitals was necessarily made to match the Roman Corinthian order shown in Dr. Thornton's design and already used for the exterior pilasters. Thornton found the order for the Capitol's columns and pilasters in Sir William Chambers' *Treatise on The Decorative Part of Civil Architecture* (1791). In the *Treatise,* Chambers illustrated only one example of the Corinthian order, which was derived from the remains of the Temple of Jupiter Stator and blended with the interior order of the Pantheon. The hybrid was "uncommonly beautiful," Chambers assured his readers, having "all the perfections of [the] originals . . . far preferable to either of them."[80] Chambers' authority in the matter of Roman architecture was unquestioned and appealed especially to amateurs such as Dr. Thornton, who called the *Treatise* an "inestimable" work.[81] But by the time Andrei and his men translated Chambers' Corinthian order from paper to stone, its Roman pedigree had already rendered it somewhat old-fashioned.

It would take one carver about six months to finish one Corinthian capital. In addition to their daily wage, the commissioner allowed the workmen an extra $260 for each capital they completed. Andrei's shop produced stonework of a type and quality rarely seen in American architecture and there was a sense among the men that their job was special. They were, after all, finishing the United States Capitol. Their pride was publicly displayed during the Fourth of July celebration in 1824. The *Washington Gazette* told its readers:

> We have this morning been informed that the Stone Cutters at the Capitol are preparing an appropriate and imposing spectacle . . . A Committee of their body has been appointed on behalf of 60 or 70 others, who will march in the procession and exhibit the operative part of their employment in cutting a Corinthian capital, intended to crown one of the Eastern front columns, and a keystone for one of the arches. Suitable colors are preparing for the occasion. We mention these facts to show the public spirit likely to manifest itself on our approaching National Anniversary.[82]

The stone carvers and cutters marched in the parade just behind President Monroe and his cabinet with a capital mounted on a "movable stage." According to a later edition of the *Gazette,* they gave a "fine specimen of their art."[83]

"ABILITY, PROMPTITUDE, AND FAITHFULNESS"

With an end of construction in sight, the mood in Congress was unusually convivial when it took up the appropriation for the 1824 building season. On December 8, 1823, Elgar submitted his report on the expenditures along with Bulfinch's funding request for the next year's work and a similar

request from James Hoban, who was building the south portico at the President's House. In the House of Representatives, the committee on public buildings reported its reaction with a rare display of official appreciation:

> Upon a full survey of the subject, the Committee find reasons to be highly gratified with the ability, promptitude, and faithfulness, displayed by the Commissioner in the management of the public interest committed to his trust. They are also disposed to award due praise to the Architects, not only for their assiduity and zeal in prosecuting the work on the public edifices; but also for the style of the workmanship—uniting ornament with strength, and giving solidity to grandeur.[84]

Bulfinch's estimate included money to finish the interior of the Capitol and to raise the columns of the east portico. Funds were needed to pave the rotunda, crypt, and passages; to carve and paint stonework; to finish the main stair in the west center building; and to erect two back stairs. In all, Bulfinch asked for $87,153. The committee noted that the necessity of the work was too obvious to require comment. On April 2, 1823, $86,000 was appropriated for the center building and a month later $3,289 was given to buy furniture.[85] The small difference in the sum appropriated and the sum needed to finish the center building would be made up from other sources such as the $593 raised by selling surplus copper or the $13,000 due from the estate of the late Samuel Lane.[86]

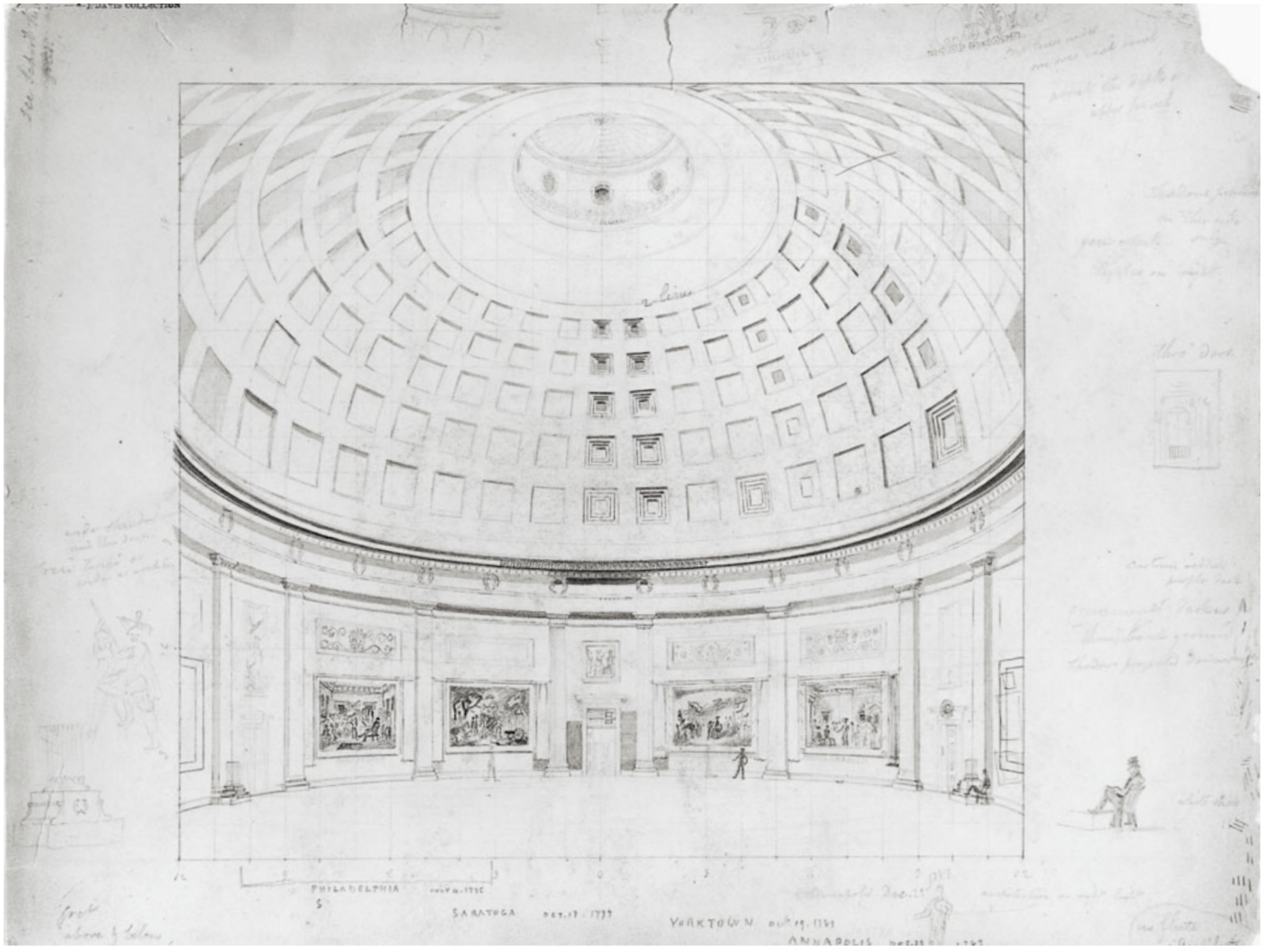
A week before the close of the first session of the 18th Congress, a joint committee reported its recommendations on the distribution of rooms in the west central building among the House, Senate, Supreme Court, and Library of Congress.[87] Senator Mahlon Dickerson of New Jersey and Congressman John W. Taylor of New York reported that the center building contained thirty-seven rooms suitable for committees. Two rooms near the Library of Congress were designated as reading rooms, one was given to the Supreme Court as a consultation room, and the large room under the library was given to the Columbian Institute (forerunner of The George Washington University). Otherwise, all rooms in the basement, ground (first), and principal (second) floors north of the center line would be used by the Senate and all rooms south of it would fall under the jurisdiction of the House of Representatives. The House would also have use of all rooms on the attic (third) floor. The commissioner was ordered to dispose of the temporary frame building formerly used by committees.

Work on the interior of the center building was, as Bulfinch and Elgar promised, finished in 1824. But on the outside, only thirteen columns were in place on the portico. Progress had been hampered by the slow delivery of sandstone from Aquia. But even with the portico half finished there was enough to show "the convenience which this addition to the building will afford, and the effect which this principal feature of the Eastern front will produce."[88]

Except for painting the stone walls and undertaking some sculptural decorations, the rotunda was complete and soon became one of the building's great attractions. It was the largest room in the Capitol, and at 7,000 square feet, one of the largest rooms in America. Once called the "Grand Vestibule" by Thornton and the "Hall of the People" by Latrobe, Bulfinch called this noble room the "rotundo":

> In the rotundo, a bold simplicity has been studied, suitable to a great central entrance and passage to more richly finished apartments. This room is ninety-six feet in diameter, and of the same height; its walls are divided into twelve compartments, by stone pilasters, or Grecian Antae; four of these compartments are occupied by doors, and the others by panels to receive paintings. The Antae supports a Grecian entablature, decorated with Isthmean wreaths in the frieze, apparently in honor of the subjects of national history to be exhibited below. The concave of the dome is divided into five ranges of large and deep caissons, finished plainly; and a border of Grecian honeysuckle surrounds the opening of the sky-light twenty-four feet in diameter, which gives light to the whole rotundo.[89]

The principal difference between Bulfinch's design for the rotunda and that of his predecessor was the absence of large niches, which were to be nearly thirty feet high. Latrobe had planned the monumental niches before Congress commissioned Trumbull's history paintings and then tried to accommodate both in later studies for the room. Bulfinch eliminated the niches altogether, providing shallow wall recesses for Trumbull's paintings as suggested by his predecessor. He added the Doric pilasters, which were originally put up with plain shafts. Apparently unhappy with the simple pilasters, he dispatched stone carvers to flute the shafts in place, paying them thirty-six dollars for



The Rotunda

by Alexander Jackson Davis, ca. 1832

Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University in the City of New York

Views of the original rotunda are scarce. This sketch shows the inner dome, the oculus, the Trumbull paintings flanked by drapery (noted as being reddish purple), two iron stoves, and a few sightseers.

each. One critic, Latrobe's biographer Talbot Hamlin, wrote that Bulfinch made a mistake by eliminating the niches, which he thought "would have given scale and interest to the whole; as it stands, it is cold, thin, and in spite of the paintings barren."[90] Despite Hamlin's authority in such matters, Bulfinch's design was practical and more structurally sound (an important factor in light of future events). Niches of the size contemplated by Latrobe would have weakened the walls and might well have looked forlorn and vacant.

Heating a room the size of the rotunda was an unusual problem, and one that had no satisfactory solution by today's standards of comfort. It was also the subject of an unusual exchange between the commissioner and the architect, two men who normally worked together well. Bulfinch wrote the commissioner about furnaces to convey warm air from the crypt to the rotunda above. Elgar replied in a stern letter in which he reprimanded the architect for failing to submit drawings for the work that might be reviewed by heating experts. The cost of stoves had not been included in the estimates and the commissioner was upset that Bulfinch was about to obligate funds without his knowledge.[91]

Bulfinch was taken aback by the tone and implications of Elgar's letter but not intimidated in the least. He stated that all the plans for the center building had been approved by the president of the United States and he did not consider the commissioner's

approval necessary for small details like stoves. He regretted not mentioning his intentions earlier but thought "it a thing so necessary to be done, & so simple & cheap in execution, that I could not imagine any possible objection—especially as flues are already built to convey smoke from the lower Rotundo."[92] As for the cost of heating, Bulfinch thought that stoves could be had at a reasonable rate and the expense of iron pipe would be no more than twenty dollars. He expected the money could be found in the contingency account. And as to their relative roles, Bulfinch remarked that Congress and the public looked to him for the "correct construction" of the Capitol, for its beauty and convenience. He was expected to devise a way to warm the rotunda, which was necessary to stop dampness streaming down its walls. The heating plan was cheap and easy to implement now but would entail a great expense if put off to a future day.

The rotunda opened in 1824 without stoves to warm it or history paintings to decorate its walls. By October the wooden picture frames designed by Bulfinch were sufficiently advanced to be put in the hands of a gilder. Elgar hired Ephraim Gilman to gild the frames, warning that if he failed to finish his work in a timely fashion he would hire someone else to do the job and would send him the bill. In 1819 the first painting Trumbull finished in his New York studio, *The Declaration of Independence,* was hung in the Supreme Court chamber after being exhibited in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. The artist earned a tidy sum charging the public to view his picture, which unexpectedly stirred a reaction in Congress among members who considered the work public property. (Trumbull earned even more after the picture was engraved by Asher Durand in 1823.) *Surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown* was completed in 1820 and was shown in New York, Boston, and Baltimore before being hung temporarily in the Senate chamber. During the next year *The Surrender of Burgoyne* was completed but was exhibited only in New York due to the disappointing gate receipts from the *Yorktown* showing. The final canvas, *George Washington Resigning his Commission,* was finished in April 1824 and was immediately put on public display in New York. Trumbull traveled with his picture to Albany, Boston, Providence, Hartford, New Haven, and Philadelphia before bringing it to Washington in December. All four canvases hung in the north wing while the rotunda walls dried sufficiently to be painted. Trumbull returned to Washington on November 18, 1826, more than two years after the rotunda opened, to supervise installation of the paintings in their permanent location.

The Pantheon
by Giovanni Paolo Panini, ca. 1750
National Gallery of Art, Washington

The rotunda of the United States Capitol was intended to replicate the grandeur and proportions of the ancient Pantheon in Rome.

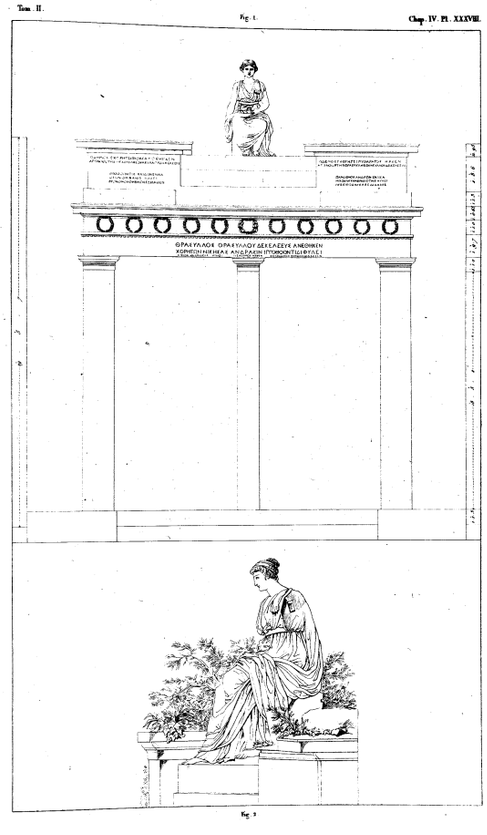
To finish the eastern portico and take care of small details on the interior, Congress appropriated $80,000, which was approved by the president on February 25, 1825. Just over two weeks had passed since the House of Representatives decided the

The Rotunda

The lower forty-eight feet of the rotunda's walls, the floor, carvings, plaques, and Trumbull's Revolutionary War scenes remain essentially as Bulfinch left them. (1980 photograph.)

Choragic Monument of Thrasyllus

From the 1825 edition of *The Antiquities of Athens* by James Stuart and Nicholas Revett



The Choragic Monument of Thrasyllus was a plain Doric composition notable for its simplified entablature with wreaths instead of the more usual triglyphs and metopes. Bulfinch modeled the rotunda walls after this design, seeking a "bold simplicity" that would not compete with the more richly ornamented legislative chambers.

election of Monroe's successor, narrowly electing John Quincy Adams as the country's sixth president. With the supporters of Andrew Jackson crying foul, the topic of discussion throughout Washington had little to do with construction matters. The appropriation was made without debate. One week later, Monroe—the last president of the Revolutionary War generation—attended Adams' inauguration in the House chamber.

Work on the east portico resumed in the spring and continued slowly throughout the building season. By June only four column shafts had been delivered; seven more were needed before the entablature could be completed and the pediment

begun. While work continued, it became time to discuss the subject of sculpture for the pediment. In the last days of his administration, Monroe advised the commissioner to offer a prize of $500 to whoever would present the best design for a statuary group to reside in the pediment. The response to the contest was overwhelming. Thirty-six designs from at least thirty artists were submitted for consideration. Among those asked to evaluate the designs was old and ailing Dr. Thornton, who thought the prize money should be split four ways. The design he liked best was a figure of Justice flanked by Wisdom and Truth, but he also admired a "model of the chariot & 4 horses with two figures of America & Liberty."[93] President Adams took a keen interest in the project, but he did not like the idea of displaying "triumphal cars and emblems of Victory, and all illusions to heathen mythology."[94] He wanted the duties of the government expressed in an obvious and intelligible manner. The president conferred with Elgar, Bulfinch, and an Italian sculptor named Luigi Persico, and they eventually decided upon a simple composition of three figures with easily understood emblems. In a letter to his son, Bulfinch described the sculpture destined for the Capitol's pediment:

> After several attempts, the following had been agreed upon: a figure of America occupies the center, her right arm resting on a shield, supported by an altar or pedestal bearing the inscription *July 4, 1776,* her left-hand pointing to the figure of *Justice,* who, with *unveiled* face, is viewing the scales, and the right hand presenting an open scroll inscribed *Constitution,* March 4, 1789; on the left of the principal figure is the eagle, and a figure of Hope resting on her anchor, with face and hand uplifted, — the whole intended to convey that while we cultivate *Justice* we may *hope* for success.[95]

The public's ability to understand the message conveyed by allegorical statuary troubled Bulfinch and perhaps others in the president's informal committee. To assist the untutored, he predicted an inscription would be provided to explain the meaning to "dull comprehensions." Despite the prediction, no caption was provided when the sculpture was unveiled in 1828.

FIRE IN THE LIBRARY

On December 5, 1825, the first session of the 19th Congress convened in the nearly completed Capitol. The rotunda walls were still too wet to paint, Trumbull's paintings hung in temporary locations in the north wing, and the east portico needed a few more columns raised and the pediment built. But soon the building would be finished and the grounds cleared of sheds and storage yards. Sculptural embellishments would continue but the masons, carpenters, and painters would be soon gone.

One of the new members of Congress from Massachusetts was Edward Everett, a professor of Greek literature and future president of Harvard. Although a freshman legislator, Everett's reputation as a scholar landed him the chair of the House Committee on the Library. On the evening of December 22, 1825, he and his wife were entertained at a dinner party given by Senator Josiah S. Johnston of Louisiana. Returning to their lodgings on Capitol Hill at 11 o'clock, they saw a suspicious flickering light through the windows on the west side of the Capitol where the Library of Congress was located. Knowing the library normally closed at seven o'clock, and that there were no fireplaces in the room, Everett decided to investigate. When he approached the building, a guard challenged him but was soon convinced that what the congressman had seen might warrant action. Going to the western grounds they encountered a Capitol policeman who saw nothing to be worried about. He agreed, however, to go inside with Everett and peek through the keyhole to see if the library was on fire. When they got there, they discovered that an inner baize-covered door blocked the view but there were no signs of smoke or heat. The policeman did not have a key, which was kept by the librarian. The two parted and Everett returned to his lodging.[96]

In a few minutes, the policeman went outside and saw the light coming through the library windows growing brighter. Not thinking he had the authority to break down the doors, he went searching for George Watterston, the librarian of Congress, who luckily lived nearby. They hurried into the building and, once the doors were opened, discovered a fire in the upper gallery but had no water to fight it. They ran to the yard in front of the Capitol and

East Portico

ca. 1870

This view of the east portico shows the wealth of sculpture associated with it: Luigi Persico's *Genius of America* (1828) is seen in the pediment; statues of War and Peace (1834), also by Persico, occupy the niches flanking the entrance to the rotunda; and Antonio Capellano's *Fame and Peace Crowning George Washington* (1827) appears above the door.

Above the niches are panels designed with oak wreaths and thirteen arrows (ca. 1825) carved by Thomas McIntosh and Jeremiah Sullivan. Bulfinch's design was likely influenced by similar panels L'Enfant installed on the upper walls of Federal Hall in New York.

On the left cheek block flanking the stairs is *Discovery of America* (1844) by Persico opposite *Rescue* (1853) by Horatio Greenough.

furiously rang the bell used to summon workmen at daybreak. In bed at the time, Everett heard the alarm and hurried to the scene where other neighbors, including Daniel Webster and Sam Houston, had come to help save the Capitol. A fire engine was found locked in a little shed and no one had the key. The doors were torn off and the equipment was hauled to the foot of the east portico. In the library flames licked at the ceiling, which was built with large wooden trusses that would surely spread the fire to the dome. But firefighters using the pump and hose liberated from the Capitol's fire station managed to extinguish the blaze before it spread beyond the ceiling. Just as the flames were brought under control, the water supply gave out.

The cause of the fire was determined to have been a candle left burning in the gallery and not noticed when the library closed for the evening. Apparently, a patron left without extinguishing the flame and, by his carelessness, inflicted heavy damage to one of the Capitol's handsomest rooms. Earlier that year, the *National Intelligencer* had called it "the most beautiful apartment in the building. Its decorations are remarkably chaste and elegant, and the architecture of the whole displays a great deal of taste."[97] When the architect's wife, Hanna Apthorp Bulfinch, informed her sons of the accident, she wrote: "Your good father has felt concerned and anxious, as he is very reasonably proud of that room."[98] She also said that the damage was not great although a carpet worth $1,000 was ruined. Many books were removed by firefighters and most of those consumed were duplicate copies stored on the gallery level.

About $3,000 was needed to repair the damage. Aware that the accident could have been far worse, legislators asked Bulfinch to see how the room could be rebuilt in a fireproof manner. Other hazards, such as the hundreds of cords of wood stored in the cellars, were also examined with fire prevention in mind. On January 3, 1826, the House Committee on the Library began its own investigation into the possibility of making the room perfectly fireproof; a month later its report concluded that little could be done short of tearing everything out and starting over. Wooden shelving could be replaced with stone but the committee considered the dampness of masonry an evil to paper almost as bad as fire. Bulfinch estimated that more than

$18,600 would be required to build stone bookcases, which he too thought would be "in a few years ruinous to the books, from the condensation of moisture, from the atmosphere upon freestone." An iron railing might replace the wood parapet on the gallery but the effort was not worth the expense. Unable to recommend any way to fireproof the library, the committee simply advised proper care of the lights and fires.[99]

Looking to other areas where the chance of fire was great, congressional committees soon focused on the cellars under the House and Senate wings where fuel for the Capitol's furnaces, stoves, and six score fireplaces was stored. Workmen going into these windowless areas to retrieve wood or coal were guided by handheld candles or lanterns, and there was always a good chance of accidentally starting a fire. The intricate labyrinth of columns, piers, and walls built to accommodate the changes to the building's floor plans would have made it nearly impossible to fight a fire if it started in the cellars. It soon became obvious that some other place would have to be found to store the Capitol's fuel supply.

In 1826 Bulfinch presented four plans to store fuel outside the Capitol.[100] Each plan provided a permanent place for a fire engine and other things such as privies best kept near but not in the Capitol. Three of the four plans called for building a terrace some distance from the west front separated from the Capitol by a pair of courtyards. No matter what other use the terrace might have, it improved the architectural effect on that side of the building. It would hide the extra story at the basement level of the central building while allowing the committee room windows to remain unblocked. The view to the grounds and Mall might be obstructed, but windows looking onto courtyards still allowed light and air into the rooms. This clever design solved the old architectural problem of the west front by giving it a uniform ground line. With his plan to screen the basement with a terrace faced by a sloping grass-covered berm, Bulfinch expanded mightily on Trumbull's advice to "plant it out."

Bulfinch's first plan for "external offices" called for a pair of buildings 140 feet long positioned near the north and south ends of the Capitol. They provided space for guard rooms, porter lodges, stables, and perhaps more committee rooms. The new buildings and a west terrace with provisions for fuel storage were estimated to cost about $122,000. His second plan provided vaults under the terrace to store vast quantities of wood and coal as well as courtyards where privies could be located. Lodges for a fire engine, guards, and porters were planned for the north and south entrances to the grounds. That scheme would cost about $99,000 to implement. The third proposal called for two crescent-shaped buildings to house the stables, engines, guards, and carriages. In this plan, the terrace was eliminated and fuel storage was provided under platforms at the ends of the Capitol, with colonnades leading to the privies. At $125,000, this was the most expensive proposal, and the most difficult to understand without drawings. "Plan No. 4" was the cheapest. It called only for a terrace and privies in the courtyards and would cost $89,600.

After considering the options, a House committee recommended that Congress adopt the second scheme. Opposition to flanking buildings was strong since, as it was pointed out, it would be foolish to begin additions to the Capitol when the main building itself was not yet finished. Charles Anderson Wickliffe of Kentucky said the Capitol was already large enough and "to a stranger, there was already, from its being a perfect labyrinth, almost as much difficulty to get out of it as some find in getting into this House."[101] James S. Stevenson of Pennsylvania regretted that the end of the session would be occupied by "a grave debate about a wood house." Another opponent to the terrace was Elisha Whittlesly of Ohio, who claimed that the west elevation was decidedly the handsomest and did not need "concealment." Despite the opposition, funds for the terrace were included in a $100,000 appropriation for the Capitol that President Adams signed on May 22, 1826.[102]

About $18,750 was used from the appropriation to finish the grand flight of stairs to the east portico. Except for the allegorical figures intended for the pediment, the east front of the Capitol stood complete at last in 1826, more than three decades after George Washington laid the building's cornerstone. The west, or garden, front had been finished for four years but was now again the site of construction activity with carpenters and masons building the terrace vaults. During the first week in June work was interrupted by a strike among stone

cutters. Even more dramatic and unfortunate was the accidental death of George Blagden, who was killed when a section of the west terrace collapsed. The loss to the works was felt immediately. Blagden had been at the Capitol since 1794, had firsthand knowledge of the complicated construction history, and was a reliable, trustworthy, and talented mason. His opinions were always held in high regard by the succession of architects, commissioners, and presidents with whom he had worked. Bulfinch learned of the tragedy in a letter written by Elgar on June 4, 1826. "We have met with an irreparable loss;" the commissioner wrote, "Mr. Blagden was killed last evening at the falling of the bank at the south angle of the Capitol."[103] In his annual report to Congress Elgar included a tribute to Blagden:

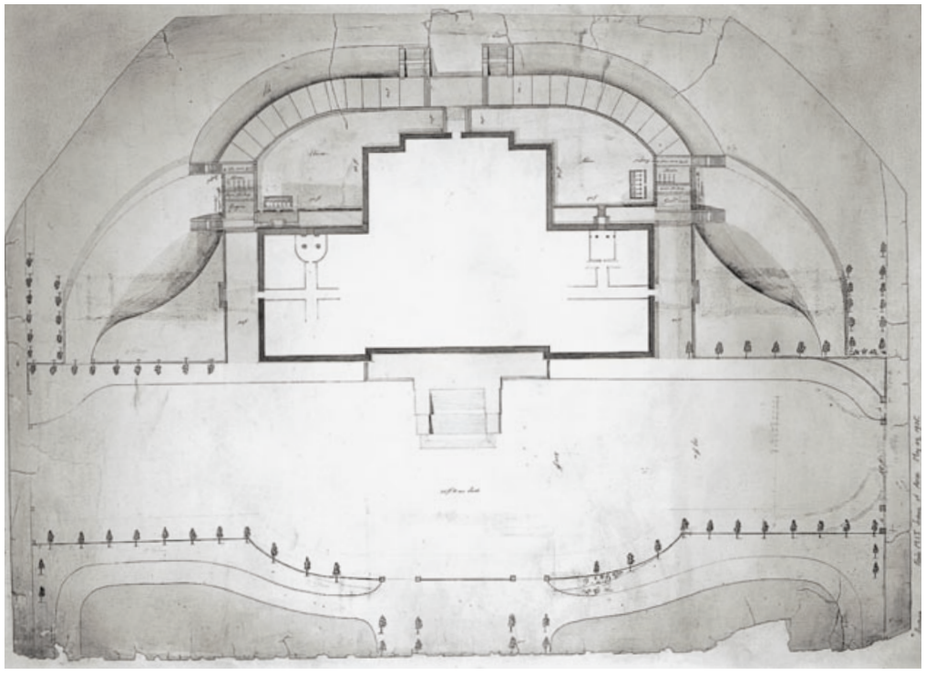
> The work suffered a severe loss by the accidental death of Mr. Blagden, which happened early in the season. Possessing in a high degree the science, and practical knowledge of his profession, he had conducted in its most important branch, the construction of the Capitol, almost from its commencement, with a precision, and fidelity, which he carried into all relations of life.[104]

Preliminary Terrace Plan and Landscape Improvements

by Charles Bulfinch ca. 1826

Library of Congress

Two privies (each with six stalls) were proposed to be built in the courtyards created by a new west terrace. Under the terrace were provisions for a guard room, two stables (each with four stalls) with adjoining hay storage areas, and a place to park the Capitol's fire engine. A slightly different plan was eventually carried out.



"THIS COLOSSAL LABYRINTH"

With the Capitol complete and the terrace underway, the mood in Congress suddenly turned sour. Proposals for improvements to the grounds, the construction of small ancillary buildings, and minor alterations to the interior all met with resistance from some legislators worn down by constant requests for money. Although funds continued to be appropriated, the amounts were pared down after some members proclaimed their exasperated belief that the Capitol would never be finished. Charles Miner of Pennsylvania said in the House that he wanted an accounting of all monies spent on the public buildings to draw attention to the never-ending construction that was sapping the public purse. After thirty years and three million dollars, the sight and sounds of construction were still common. He had been coming to Washington for twenty years and witnessed the same confusion about the Capitol—the same rolling of huge stones, and the same din of workmen. Was this ever to cease? Solomon's Temple was finished in seven years, but these buildings had been in the hands of workmen more than seven and twenty years.[105] And it was not only the Capitol that was in a perpetual state of incompleteness. The President's House was another case in point:

> The President's garden was, and always had been, a scene of confusion—to him it seemed as if the same cartman, who was there ten years ago, were still employed hauling dirt from one part of the enclosure to the other—there was none of the elegance, the repose, and the beauty, which there should be in the garden of a private gentleman. Last year it was proposed to take down the wall around the President's House, to rebuild it on a different plan—the work was like Penelope's web; what was done at one time was undone at another and never finished.

John Cocke of Tennessee agreed, but blamed the prolonged construction on the architects and superintendents who brought plans and estimates before the House year after year and who would lose employment if they failed to concoct things to build. He thought a mere accounting of money would not achieve anything and wished Miner to change his motion so that it would preclude the

View of the Capitol
by Charles Burton, 1824
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1942

This carefully drawn view shows the west front at the time it was finished and before the terrace was begun. Lining Pennsylvania Avenue were double rows of Lombardy poplars planted during the Jefferson administration.

submission of any further plans. He suspected that architects and builders would continue to devise ways of spending money as long as Congress permitted it.[106]

An alternative point of view was provided by Ichabod Bartlett of New Hampshire, who reminded his colleagues that plans and estimates were made in obedience to congressional instructions. The reason yearly appropriations were requested was due to the manner the House chose to make funds available. If yearly requests were too annoying, the House should be prepared to make one large appropriation to finish the Capitol and grounds. After Bartlett finished his short, well-reasoned talk, Miner withdrew his motion.

The funding needed for the 1827 building season totaled $104,789, but due to a surplus only $79,244 was requested in a new appropriation. These funds were necessary to complete small jobs around the Capitol, to landscape the grounds, and to erect buildings for gate keepers, an engine house, and stables.[107] About $1,200 was needed to purchase a second fire engine. At first the stables were to be located on the Capitol grounds but it was subsequently considered more economical to relocate them to adjacent property. Simple brick structures would suffice there, whereas, if built within the enclosure, something grander would have been called for. Also contained within the request were monies to build a bridge from the new terrace to the Capitol and to convert a window into a door in the large room under the library. Thus, the west front would gain a second entrance.

Part of the appropriation was earmarked for stoves to warm the passages leading to the rotunda

and for guard rails to protect the history paintings that were recently mounted in that room. John W. Campbell of Ohio thought these items unnecessary and moved to reduce the appropriation accordingly. But Congressman Everett thought the stoves were needed to avoid the abrupt change in temperature upon entering long, cold passages. The moist chilly air of the Capitol's corridors reminded him more of the Bastille than any other building he was ever in.[108] Campbell, however, was unmoved by his colleague's explanation. He still thought too much money was spent on unnecessary improvements and remarked: "What may be considered economy in Massachusetts, would be considered extravagance in Ohio." Wickliffe of Kentucky agreed and voiced opposition to building anything new, even plain brick stables. His views were similar to those expressed by John Cocke earlier in the session—both blamed the architect for prolonging construction—but Wickliffe suspected there was a nefarious plot afoot to keep the Capitol unfinished forever:

> The root of the whole evil, the cause of the immense expenditure and waste of public money, upon this Colossal Labyrinth, may be traced to the fact that we have some four or five gentlemen who are drawing an annual salary from the public Treasury, whose interest it is, and whose ingenuity is tasked, between the end and commencement of Congress, to project some new scheme or fancied improvement upon which to expend the public money. These salaries will continue until you finish this building; they will never finish it, as long as you furnish them money to waste upon it. Unless Congress will check the appropriations, the finishing of the Capitol, like the payment of the public debt, will always be 'anticipated.'[109]

Legislators asked why the rotunda needed to be heated, why the new entrance from the terrace was necessary, and why stables should be built. One member argued that if the rotunda were warmed, it would only create a comfortable resort for "loungers and idlers."[110] Spending money to build a "wall," as the terrace was called disparagingly, was foolish enough in some minds, but spending more money to "get over it so as to get into the Capitol" was ludicrous. One critic said that he would gladly vote to tear the terrace down rather than fund the bridge. Providing stables at public expense would only lead to buying horses and feed with public money. Some members thought there would be no end to the business of building the Capitol. But at the close of debate, their suspicions were insufficient to carry the day: the House approved an appropriation of nearly $84,000 on March 2, 1827. Despite the rancor, the only items dropped in the final bill were the railings in front of Trumbull's paintings and the bridge to link the west center building with the terrace.

Most of the work done during the 1827 building season took place outside. Antonio Capellano finished a sculptural group over the portico entrance to the rotunda entitled *Fame and Peace Crowning Washington* while his compatriot, Luigi Persico, worked on *Genius of America* in the pediment. Cartloads of dirt removed from the east garden were hauled to the terrace, where they were unloaded to help build up a berm that would later be planted with grass. The top of the terrace was paved with Seneca stone from Maryland and an iron railing was installed to guard against sightseers falling into the courtyards. To build the privies in the courtyards, the earth in front of the foundations of the two wings was excavated and small, one-story structures erected against the newly exposed walls. Openings cut in the old foundations connected with interior staircases in the cellars to allow senators in the north wing and congressmen in the south wing to access their privies without venturing outside. Twelve stalls were provided in the south privy, while the north privy had just six. Skylights were used in lieu of windows and the flat roofs provided places for fragrant plants. At night, workmen emptied pails of waste into the canal at the foot of Capitol Hill.

Landscape improvements had begun before Bulfinch's arrival in Washington. In 1816 Congress appropriated $30,000 to enclose and improve the garden east of the Capitol. The following year $38,658 was given to continue fencing the grounds. By 1819 Griffith Coombs' bill for iron and stone for the Capitol's fence alone totaled $67,925. More than ornamental, the fence was necessary to prevent wandering cows, goats, and hogs from ruining the grass and shrubbery. Bulfinch continued the landscape improvements by extending the fence completely around the twenty-two and a half acres then comprising the Capitol's grounds. He also designed a fence to separate the east garden from the carriage drive. Gideon Davis of Georgetown contracted with the commissioner on June 12, 1828, to supply the extensive ironwork for the

fence. Vehicular and pedestrian entrances from A Street north and A Street south were regulated by gates erected in the spring of 1829.

Inside, the walls of the rotunda were painted in 1827, two powerful stoves were installed in the crypt to warm the room above, and the principal sculptural decorations were completed. In panels over the four doors, sculpted vignettes showed early encounters between Europeans and American Indians, each implicitly promoting the idea of "Manifest Destiny." Two were violent, two were peaceful, and each took place in a different part of the country. *Landing of the Pilgrims* and *William Penn's Treaty with the Indians* illustrated cordial relations occurring in New England and the mid-Atlantic region, while *Preservation of Captain Smith by Pocahontas* and *Conflict of Daniel Boone and the Indians* depicted fierce encounters in the south and west.

At the close of the 1827 building season Bulfinch claimed the effects of the stoves could not be felt until the opening in the rotunda floor was closed to stop cold air entering from the crypt. The circular aperture had been provided to help light the crypt but was soon considered a nuisance. He also called attention to the four vacant panels and said that the rotunda could not be considered complete until additional paintings illustrating significant "national subjects" were commissioned. (Trumbull seldom missed the opportunity to declare his willingness to paint more scenes from the Revolutionary War era.) The architect proposed a new visitor gallery for the Senate chamber to prevent the necessity of visitors being admitted to the floor. This would allow the upper gallery along the east wall, which had little headroom and was difficult to access, to be removed. For the House wing, Bulfinch again recommended removing the principal staircase, which had survived the fire of 1814 but was worn and poorly lighted. He proposed building a more graceful, light, and airy staircase in its place. The brick and tile paving on the first floor passages was so worn that Bulfinch wanted to re-pave the areas with stone. Gate houses were needed to help control access to the grounds.[111] Bulfinch provided estimates for these small items on what modern builders call the "punch list." They were submitted to Congress on February 1, 1828.[112]

When the funding request was taken up by the House on April 28, 1828, the number of gate and guard houses was the first topic of discussion. Two lodges were proposed for the western entrance to the grounds at Pennsylvania Avenue and one each at the carriage entrances from A Streets north and south. John Woods of Ohio moved to strike them from the legislation. Everett immediately rose to support the lodges and was joined by John W. Taylor and Dudley Marvin of New York. Henry Dwight of Massachusetts offered a compromise—retain the western lodges and forgo the others. His suggestion was approved. Wickliffe of Kentucky wanted to remove funds that were earmarked to rebuild the main staircase leading to the House chamber. Everett condemned the old stair, which he called "very confined and inconvenient," and explained the advantages of a new circular one. Other adjustments, such as moving the private stairs and creating a new lobby, were also contemplated and would, in Everett's opinion, greatly improve access to the chamber. Despite Wickliffe's opposition, the proposal to rebuild the staircase was approved.[113]

Fortified by the staircase victory, Everett moved to add funds to build the bridge connecting the center of the Capitol with the terrace. He claimed that the entrance from the terrace would be a great convenience to those approaching the building from the west and was "indispensable to the symmetry of that front of the building." How the door and bridge resolved matters of symmetry is hard to imagine, and it was not questioned at the time, but James Mitchell of Tennessee "warmly opposed" Everett's amendment as another useless expense. He did not care about the terrace and only wanted the "speedy payment of the public debt." But the question before the House pertained to a new entrance, and it was approved seventy-two to thirty-six.[114] Three days later the Senate agreed, and the president approved $56,400 for the Capitol and $3,121 for the connecting bridge.[115]

On the last day of the session (May 26, 1828), Everett submitted a resolution asking the commissioner of public buildings to "secure the paintings in the Rotundo from the effects of dampness."[116] Although the paintings had hung in the room less than two years, they already showed the effects of moisture and were destined to ruin unless measures were taken. After a brief debate, it was

decided that Trumbull should direct the operation and be allowed a reasonable compensation.

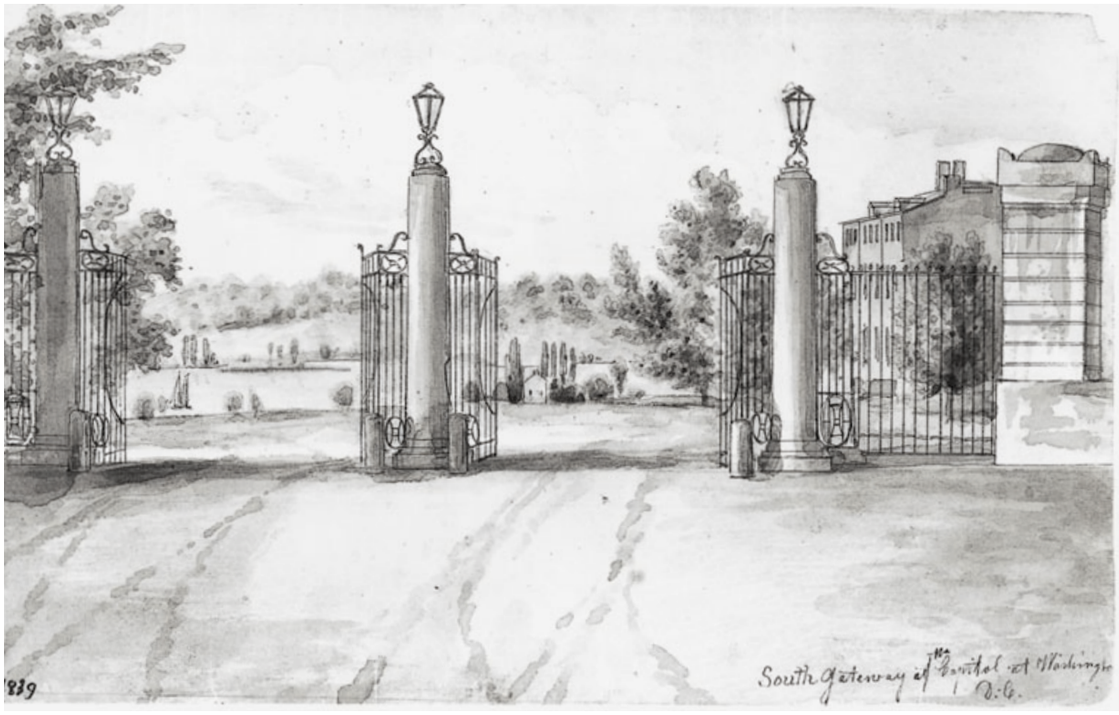
As soon as he learned of the resolution Trumbull wrote Elgar to say that he would come to Washington once the opening in the rotunda floor was closed. It was useless to begin restoration until the source of dampness was eliminated. The aperture was duly filled in, and after the workmen were gone Trumbull arrived to supervise removal of the paintings from their frames; they were then taken to a warm, dry room for examination. As the artist had feared, mildew was discovered on the backs of the linen canvases. They were laid out—paint down—on carpets to air out. Drawing on published reports from French chemists who studied Egyptian mummies and antiquarians in England who examined the body of King Edward I, Trumbull learned that wax had been used as a preservative and it did not affect the brilliance of colors. He determined to coat the unpainted backs with common beeswax and turpentine, brushed on and then gone over with hot irons. Meanwhile, the niches in the walls were coated with cement and vents cut to let air circulate behind the paintings. The paintings, after their wax treatment, were stretched across flat boards drilled with hundreds of holes to allow the canvases to breathe. With this backing, the pictures were protected from "careless or intentional blows of sticks, canes, &c., or children's missiles." The four paintings were then put back into their places, cleaned, and lightly revarnished. Curtains were hung that could be closed when the floor was swept or in summer when Congress was in recess. Thus the canvases were protected from clouds of dust and "the filth of flies," which Trumbull claimed were the "most destructive enemies of paintings." Self-closing doors covered with baize were hung at the entrances to keep the room warm and damp-free. By keeping the doors closed and the furnaces lighted, Trumbull found that the temperature remained at sixty-three degrees, a level that would keep the paintings "perfectly and permanently secured against the deleterious effects of dampness." He still wished to install railings at least ten feet from the walls but did not have the authority. The right foot of General Morgan in the *Surrender of Burgoyne* had previously been cut off using a common penknife, and while the wound had been repaired, railings were desirable to prevent further acts of vandalism. Trumbull spent seventy days in Washington supervising the restoration of his paintings, for which he was paid $560.[117]

The commissioner of public buildings reported that $59,020 was spent on the Capitol and grounds during the 1828 building season—$500 less than anticipated. Lack of materials prevented the first-floor corridor paving from being completed and the landscaping, being a "progressive work," was also unfinished.[118] A local blacksmith named James Martin installed the new visitor's gallery in the Senate chamber in the fall of 1828. Thin iron columns with capitals modeled on the Corinthian order were used to support a curving platform while twenty-five iron joists supported a wooden floor. A railing weighing almost a ton was installed as well.[119] Bulfinch designed the new gallery and was thus responsible for the introduction into the Capitol of architectural ironwork, which would become a favorite material for the next generation of Capitol builders.

Bulfinch did not write an annual report for the year 1828. Whatever he might have said, it would not have diverted attention from the presidential

Gate House

Until they were relocated in the 1870s, small stone houses were used by gate keepers tending the entrances to the Capitol's western garden. Unless the gates were closely guarded, cattle, sheep, hogs, and goats would enter and feast on the garden's lush vegetation. Bulfinch designed the structures in 1828 with belt courses and panels derived from the exterior stonework of the Capitol. (1960 photograph.)



South Gateway of Capitol at Washington, D. C.

by August Kollner
1839

Library of Congress

The carriage entrances to the Capitol grounds were protected by high iron gates and stone column shafts topped by lanterns. A lone congressional boarding house, pastures, and forests appear in the background.

election, a rematch between the cold, reserved, and austere incumbent, John Quincy Adams, and the charismatic hero of the Battle of New Orleans, Andrew Jackson. Old Hickory's followers had waited four years for the rematch, suspecting that Henry Clay's support for Adams in 1824 had cost their hero the presidency. After Adams named Clay secretary of state, they had evidence of what they called a "corrupt bargain." But four years later Jackson rode to the President's House in a landslide that was seen as a victory for the frontier west over the stale aristocracy of the east. Emotions ran high before and after the results were tallied, and there is little wonder that Commissioner Elgar wrote only a two-sentence report on the Capitol's progress in 1828 and Bulfinch wrote nothing at all.

On March 3, 1829, the last day of the lame duck session, Congress appropriated $18,762 for repairs around the Capitol and grounds. Bulfinch requested money to build a railing along the central walk in the western grounds to protect the grounds from cattle.[120] He found that when the western gate was left open, cattle wandered onto the grounds and did great harm to the newly planted trees and shrubs. Other small items needed to be completed, but most of the money granted was to keep things in good repair.

The day after the appropriation was made, Andrew Jackson was inaugurated president on the east portico of the Capitol, setting off a raucous celebration that lasted weeks. As the grand, sheltered entrance to the "Temple of Liberty," the portico became the preferred stage for presidential inaugurals until the event was relocated to the more spacious west front in 1981. Throngs of supporters came to Washington for Jackson's swearing in, and one supporter wrote a newspaper in the president's home state of Tennessee that he witnessed an astonishing sight in the rotunda. It was an exhibition of a new railroad car loaded with eight passengers pulled across the room by a single thread of American-made sewing cotton.[121] Such displays were not then uncommon in the rotunda but would later be discouraged.

On June 25, 1829, Elgar wrote Bulfinch a terse note informing the architect that his services would no longer be needed after the end of the month. Admittedly, little work remained, but the sudden dismissal smacked of reproach. In earlier conversations with members of Congress, Bulfinch had

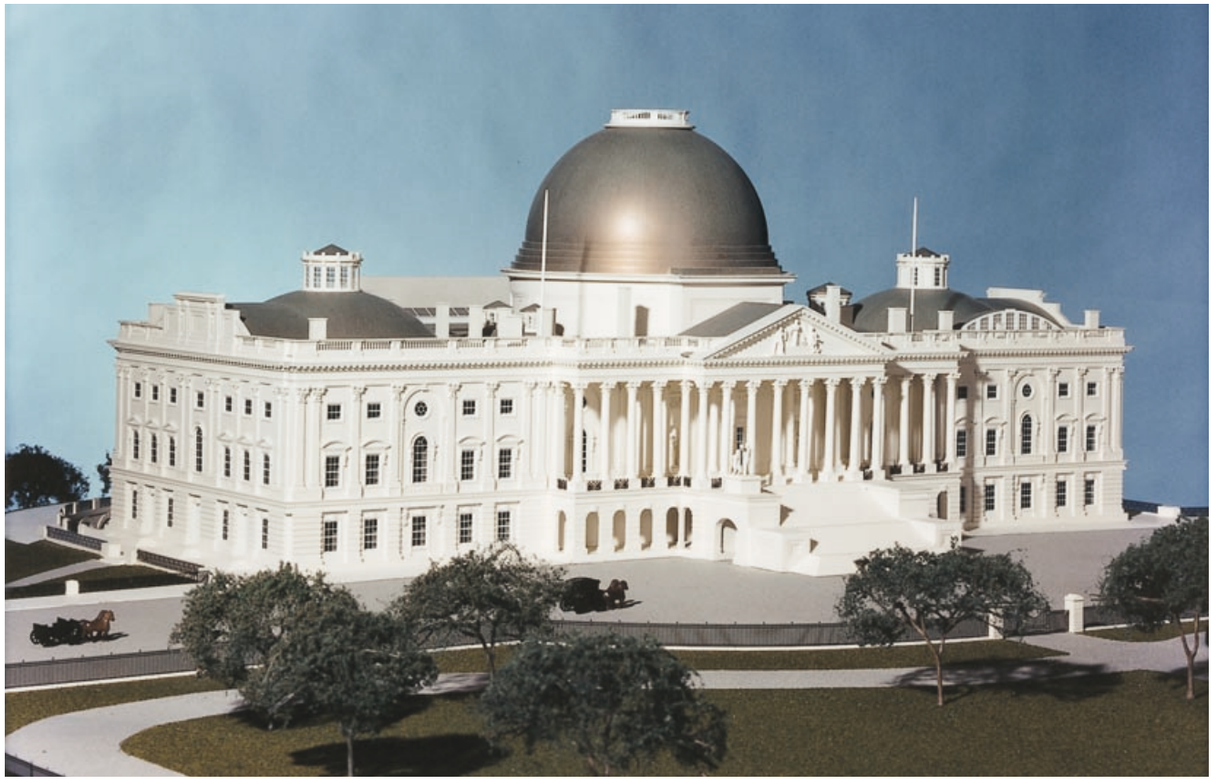
Representatives' Principal Staircase

The circular stair and scalloped niche were installed in 1828 within a two-story space built twenty-one years earlier. While the remodeling disrupted Latrobe's sequence of changing spatial and lighting experiences, the new stair provided a more graceful approach to the House chamber. (1975 photograph.)

indicated that he was prepared to leave at the end of September and wished to complete his government service without a hint of unpleasantness. Two days after Elgar's letter was written, however, Bulfinch wrote a memorial to President Jackson asking to be continued three more months in order to finish up and avoid the impression of censure.[122]

The president denied Bulfinch's request, saying it was his duty to guard against wasteful expenditures. The order, he explained, was issued simply because the commissioner decided the Capitol no longer required architectural services. But there was no intention of implying any dissatisfaction with the architect's conduct or talents. Jackson stated that he did not wish "to manifest the slightest disapprobation of the manner in which you have discharged your duties."[123] Thus, with five days' notice, Bulfinch's eleven and a half years of service came to an end.

After leaving the Capitol, Bulfinch found enough work to keep him in Washington for another year. He designed a penitentiary for the capital city, a jail for Alexandria, and a naval hospital in Norfolk. For these extra services Bulfinch received $600 and was allowed an additional $500 to pay for returning his family to Boston.[124] He departed Washington during the first week of June 1830, leaving friends behind with sincere regret. The city had given him a pleasant home for twelve years and he seemed almost as reluctant to leave as he had been to go there in the first place.[125] Bulfinch had the satisfaction of concluding the longest running architectural drama in the nation's history, one with more players and critics than he cared to recall. He was the first architect to leave the Capitol without a cloud over his head, the only one to look upon his years there with affection. Perhaps his success as a Washington architect was due to his political and social experiences in Boston, or perhaps it was his common sense and unwillingness to pick fights he could not win. George Hadfield had called the Capitol a "seat of broils, confusion, and squandered thousands," but Bulfinch left it with a profound sense of professional and personal satisfaction.[126]



Model of the Capitol As Completed by Bulfinch

These views look northwest (above) and northeast (below). Note the exterior stair leading to the top of the dome in the bottom view. (1994 photographs.)